

+plus

- 10 of the best digital images
- **Draw detailed scenes**
- Craft dynamic characters
- and much more!

Creating hyperrealistic portraits

Discover how self-taught artist, Victor Grasso uses his coastal roots as inspiration

Becoming a concept artist

Darek Zabrocki reveals
how to keep your style
varied and fresh

Paint snowy environments

Marisa Lewis presents a
beginner's guide to painting
landscapes in Photoshop



Editor's Letter



JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

Welcome to 2dartist issue 109!

Welcome to our first issue of 2015, packed with top tutorials and resources to get your year off to a creative start! Try learning the basics of painting a snowy landscape, or creating magical characters in Photoshop with Cristina Lavina, or discovering matte painting techniques with Davide Binello.

Skilled illustrator, Justin Gerard shows us how to sketch a detailed scene, while Lena Richards opens the pages of her other-worldly sketchbook. We also talk to talented concept artist Darek Zabrocki, look at traditional artist Victor Grasso's stunning artwork, and much more. Enjoy!

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Contributors



DAREK ZABROCKI

Darek Zabrocki is a concept artist and illustrator living in Cambridge, UK working for Sony Guerrilla Games. He has contributed to projects from companies such as Ubisoft, Sony, Sega and 20th Century Fox.



MARISA LEWIS

Marisa Lewis is a freelance illustrator and resident at 3dtotal HQ and would like to make a picturebook one day. She guides you through the creation of a snowy landscape in Photoshop.



VICTOR GRASSO

Victor Grasso is a self-taught artist who has carved an impressive career through his signature, photorealistic style. He chats to us about his work and how the coast inspires him!



DAVIDE BINELLO

Davide Binello is a matte painter from Italy currently living and working in London. Before getting into VFX he earned a degree in Philosophy, specializing in Aesthetics and Semiotics, and Arts.



LENA RICHARDS

Lena Richards is a self-taught artist and in several years she moved through the positions of illustrator and concept artist for mobile games before arriving at the role of visual development artist for fantasy RPG games.



CRISTINA LAVINA

Cristina Lavina worked as a concept artist for more than 2 years at Opus Artz (London), learning from Bjorn Hurri. She currently works at Fathom Interactive, Vancouver developing games for mobile devices.



JUSTIN GERARD

From the moment that Justin Gerard first learned that crayons were meant for coloring and not eating, he has been drawing. He derives inspiration from nature and human history, though his favorite source is story.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUBMIT TO 2DARTIST?

We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: jess@3dtotal.com.

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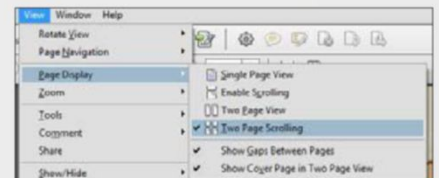
If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing

For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: **DOWNLOAD**

To view the many double-page spreads featured in 2dartist magazine, you can set the reader to display "two-up", which will show double-page spreads as one large landscape image:

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Jump to articles

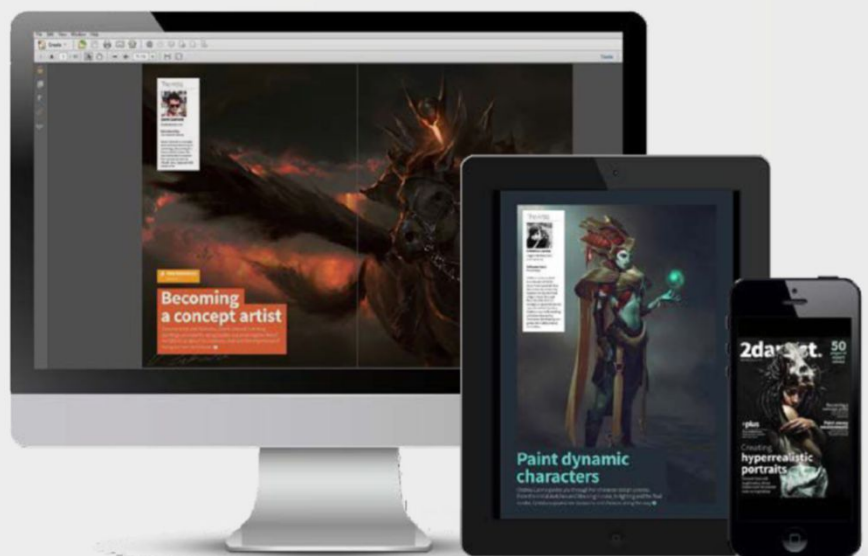
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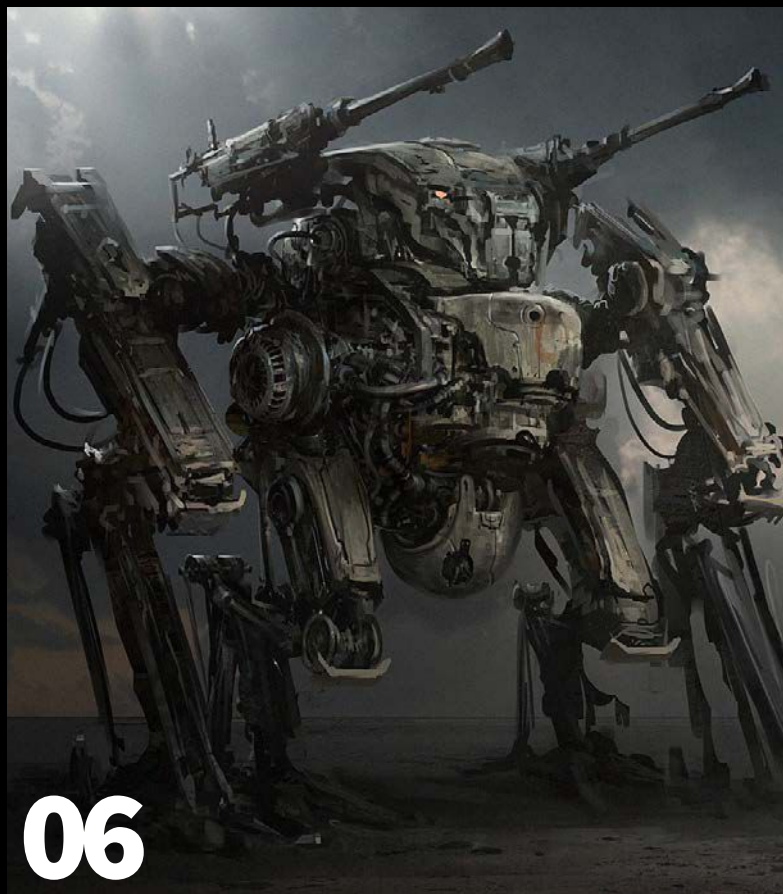
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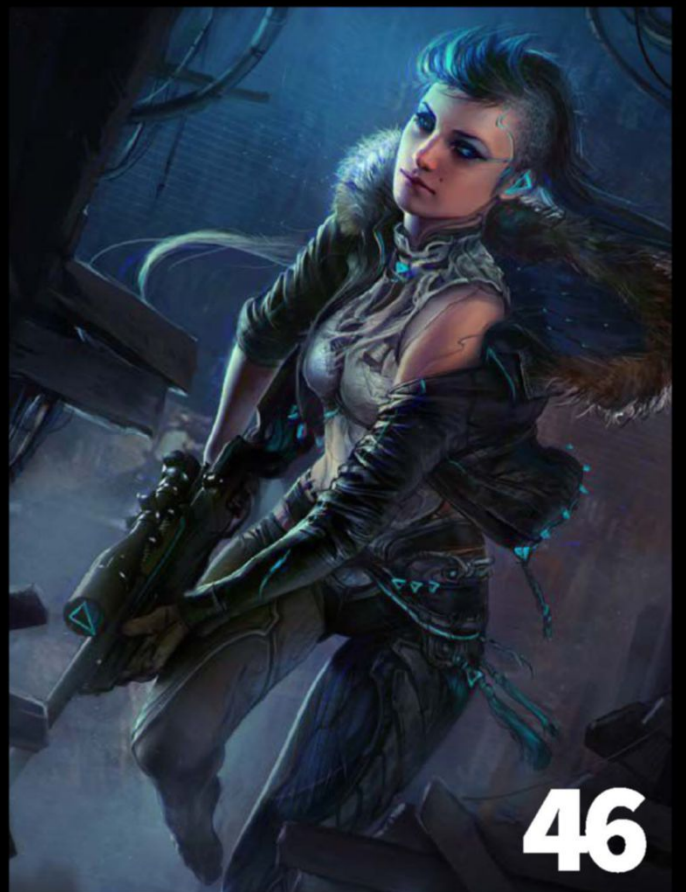
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The Artist



Darek Zabrocki

darekzabrocki.com

Interviewed by:

Jess Serjent-Tipping

Darek Zabrocki is a concept artist and illustrator living in Cambridge, UK working for Sony Guerrilla Games. He has contributed to projects from companies such as Ubisoft, Sony, Sega and 20th Century Fox.

 **FREE RESOURCES**
Brushes

Becoming a concept artist

Concept artist and illustrator, Darek Zabrocki's striking paintings are instantly recognizable, but what inspires them? He talks to us about his creations, style and the importance of trying out new techniques ▶

D. Zabrocki



Concept artist and illustrator, Darek Zabrocki started drawing at the age of three and at first it was nothing but a hobby. He always wanted to develop his passion and become an artist working in the entertainment industry. In 2007, he switched from traditional techniques to digital painting and began producing work professionally, with a client list including companies such as Ubisoft, Sony, Sega and 20th Century Fox.

Darek talks about facing new challenges and trying new techniques. And furthermore, how he never stops exploring and learning new stuff that keeps him motivated!

2dartist: Hi Darek, thanks for chatting with 2dartist today! First, could you us a little bit about yourself and your journey? What got you into digital art?

Darek Zabrocki: Hello thanks for inviting me! My journey started when I was a very young and small child, I had just watched the *Lion King* cartoon and I felt a very strong need to paint a scene from this movie. I started drawing every day for 5-6 hours. After a few years I had thousands (really!) of drawings all over my room. My parents were amazing for me and supported me in many ways; they kept buying me paper, pencils, and paints. Basically, they supplied me with all I needed and were always with me. ►



● A painting from Darek's personal series, *Sniper* © Darek Zabrocki



● A personal car design © Darek Zabrocki



D. Zabrocki

● A painting from Darek's *Night Life* series © Darek Zabrocki





“Everything can be inspirational; there are no limitations for inspiration! I love watching movies, interesting documentaries and reading articles”

When I was teenager I felt I'd burned out, I didn't want to paint anymore and I started thinking about something else to do with my life. My mother (fortunately) couldn't stand my way of thinking and helped me back on the track giving me subjects that potentially would inspire me. It was such an amazing idea and eventually I felt that need again after a year or more of doing nothing. It has lasted to today and I hope it will last forever because I believe that's the thing I am on this planet for.

Regarding digital techniques I stumbled upon Marek Okon's work in 2005 or 2006 and I couldn't believe he painted them, especially using Photoshop and a tablet device that I'd never heard about before. I decided to give it a try and after couple of months I officially switched from traditional media to digital in 2007.

2da: What was it about the digital tools that made you want to pursue a career in the industry?

DZ: It came naturally, really. I didn't know if I would ever be able to make a living from drawing but I really believed it could happen. I thought when people become good at something and are stubborn they can make a living out of it.

I got my first commissions after I bought my tablet and started to gain exposure. It was very hard though; for years I wasn't anywhere, I got some small commissions and received a few features but nothing fancy till the last year or two. Then in 2013/2014 I felt I was ready for the industry, but I didn't force anyone to hire me, I just let it go and waited for my opportunity. ▶



● A painting from Darek's *Night Life* series © Darek Zabrocki

🕒 Artist Timeline Darek's career so far

1994: Darek watched the *Lion King*. It all started there; he was influenced by this cartoon and started drawing every day

1995 – 2006: Drawing different subjects, studying hobby subjects like history, animals and so on

2007: Switched from traditional to digital media

2008: First commissioned work

October 2013: Founded Level Up! An educational program/podcast along with Wojtek Fus

November 2013: LA trip after his *Nazgul* work won the International Contest: Infected by Art. It opened his eyes to many things both in terms of art and life

Late 2013: Started doing Daily Speedpaints for a Facebook group called Daily Spitpainting. It helped improve creativity, tempo and he learned a lot of stuff. Thanks to this he got commissions from companies like Axis, Firaxis Games and worked for a project under 20th Century Fox

May 2014: Explored his *Night Life* series and built his own official website

September 2014: After summer, Darek started working at studios like Sega, Creative Assembly, BigPoint and Ubisoft

November 2014: He started working as in-house concept artist at Sony Guerrilla Games in Cambridge

2015: Waiting for new and exciting things

● A painting from Darek's
personal series, *Sniper*
© Darek Zabrocki



D. Zabrocki





D. Zabolotni



● Riot © Darek Zabrocki

I started using Facebook and YouTube to promote myself, focusing more on doing tutorials and sharing knowledge. I founded Level Up! with my friend Wojtek Fus and it really exposed us to many people, and surprisingly not only the people who wanted to learn with us. I got bigger commissions, I started doing work for big studios and working on different titles. I thought if I ever have a chance to get work onsite I at a studio would try it. Then Sony reached out to me and it happened!

2da: Where do you draw your inspiration from? What influences your work the most?

DZ: Everything can be inspirational; there are no limitations for inspiration! I love watching movies, interesting documentaries and reading articles. I rarely play games but if I play it has to be the title that will inspire me. So I choose the games very carefully. I love nature, I love observing and I started travelling a bit lately. It really broadens your mind and perception; it can help to expand your visual library and range of subjects you can take up in your personal paintings.

2da: What is your creative process like? Could you take us through a typical process?

DZ: I usually start with some sketch ideas. I start with two or three colors and expand them on the go; I don't like doodling without an initial idea. It happens sometimes and I have had a couple of happy accidents with doodling, but I like having a concept in my mind, setting up the camera angle and perspective imagining how it would look, and try to convey it on the canvas.

It's the most exciting part when you can sketch out your ideas. Sometimes If I have a strong need to paint something but don't have a clear idea, I look into my reference folder and try to figure out what I could paint, what colors could I use and so on.



D. Kroski

Building your reference folders/visual library is very very important as well!

2da: Your *Night Life* series are so vibrant and hold a traditional feel to them. How long does each painting take and does the process differ from your other concept art?

DZ: Thanks! It's one of the series that is very close to me. I was inspired by my London trip from last year, and beautiful Jeremy Mann paintings as well! I also started expanding on the history of it and maybe I will do something bigger with that series.

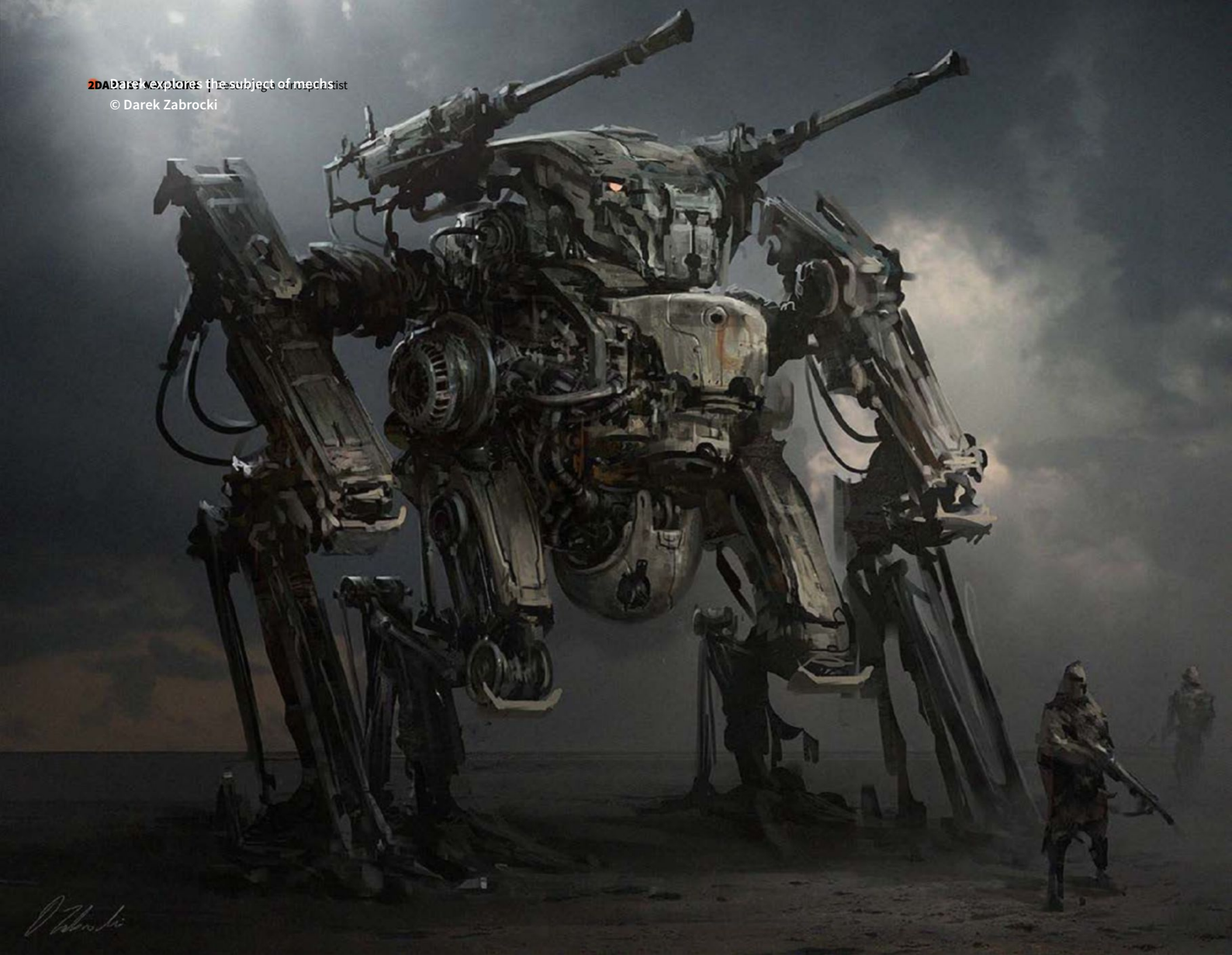
The main goal was just to convey some rainy city scenes with a traditional feel and taste so people couldn't really recognize whether it was done with a tablet in Photoshop or with paints. It is not that easy, but very exciting and satisfying because I try to use the same way of thinking and try to work with Photoshop tools in the same way I have used paints in the past.

For my *Night Life* series I usually spend from two hours to two days maximum on one piece. It depends on the result I want to achieve and scene complexity. Usually these are fast paintings though.

It differs quite a lot from the concept art I do these days. In the studio I use a lot of different techniques. For me the biggest breakthrough is definitely happening when I mix my painting techniques with 3D. I still sketch out my ideas first though, and then go into a 3D software or use photo manipulations. Basically it's mix of everything!

2da: What has been the most valuable lesson you've learned about digital art and working in the industry so far?

DZ: Use any tool you want. We all work for clients that need our work to be done quickly and ►



accurately, no one really cares if you use photos, textures or 3D. The result matters so use anything you need just to make it fast and looking nice. In the end you stay the artist and creator of your own ideas.

2da: How do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

DZ: I like doing some sport, going to the gym, swimming and listening to relaxing music. I would love to spend more time on reading and watching documentaries, but for now it's not that possible since I don't have much time for myself!

2da: Out of all your stunning work, which piece are you most proud of, and why?

DZ: Very tough and tricky question! Usually, I am not satisfied with my works but I would be lying if I told you I don't like any of them. I have a few ones that I like quite a lot and these are: *Mystic Dragon*, *Red*

⚡ PRO TIP

Make your own brushes

I always thought I would be painting like Mathias Verhasselt, Craig Mullins or any other digital master when I used their brushes. I quickly realized there is nothing worse than that kind of thinking. I grew up and I knew I only had to use the few brushes that I needed and there is no "magic" one that will make me a great artist.

I started working on my own set then and about a year ago I completed quite a capacious brush pack. This brush set contains the brush I use almost 90% of time, made by me called Darek's special brush!



● **Black Pegasus** – a speed painting made using Darek's brush set. © Darek Zabrocki



● *Mystic Dragon* © Darek Zabrocki

Lights and Imperial Walkers. I am happy with every one of them because these are different genres and I like to try to be as versatile as I can. I can say when I am proud of my work, especially when I publish some work and I get a job thanks to it. It happened when I published my first mech design a couple of month's ago – it brought me to Sony for instance.

2da: What would be your perfect project to work on?

DZ: I think it's not a surprise for some people, but definitely a *Star Wars* movie!

2da: You have worked for many reputable clients, which is the dream that many artists have; if you could give a useful piece of advice to someone who is considering diving into the world of digital art, what would it be?

DZ: Stay true to yourself and never stop chasing your dreams. Keep working on your own style and never give up. The worst thing is to imitate your idols because they achieved something. Of course every one of us did it at some point but it can't last for a longer period of time because you will always be that 'second' guy. I remember times when I wanted to be like Marek Okon or Maciej Kuciara. I realized the best thing is to try to take something interesting you learn from every one of your favorite artists and add that sparkle from yourself. When you put everything together you are able to create your own style that stands out from others.

2da: What are you working on at the moment?

DZ: I'm working on very exciting projects at Sony Guerrilla, doing some work for Sega and I had a

chance to contribute to the new Ubisoft title! So much fun on each of these projects and every one of them is so different.

2da: Finally, what are your artistic goals and what can we expect to see from you in the future?

DZ: I would love to direct a movie in the future. I don't want to tell anything more about it yet because I have rough ideas in my head, but it would be lovely to do something like this one day. I will do my best to entertain people with my new work. What you can expect from me is diversity and a lot of new unexpected stuff!

2da: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to 2dartist! ●

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Italian digital artist Lorenzo Zitta knows how to create thought provoking still images with LightWave 11.6. Whether the still is computer-generated with LightWave, an artful arrangement of digital photos, or a combination of the two, the composition of the scene – with its attention to detail and unusual merging of objects – demands a closer look.

"Thanks to LightWave, I can quickly test many different approaches for my projects. I love bringing models into Layout and switching on Radiosity, then start working on shading and lighting, bringing in more elements, and testing and improvising to get the look I want." - Lorenzo Zitta.

 **LightWave 11.6**
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Victor Grasso
victorgrasso.com

Materials Used:
Traditional tools

Victor Grasso is a self taught artist who has carved an impressive career through his signature, photorealistic style.

T R A D I T I O N A L S P O T L I G H T

Creating hyperrealistic paintings

Victor Grasso shows us a sample of his surreal yet realistic portfolio, including portraits adorned with accessories from the ocean using oils on canvas and charcoals ▶

Victor Grasso is an incredible, self-taught artist and painter based in New Jersey. Inspired by his coastal roots, Victor often paints his subjects with accessories harvested from the deep, creating an unbelievable combination of darkness and beauty in his paintings. Enjoy these surreal yet seemingly realistic portraits, as Victor shares his artist journey.

2dartist: Hello! Thanks for talking to 2dartist. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Victor Grasso: My pleasure, thanks for having me. My name is Victor Grasso. I am an artist based in the southern most point of New Jersey, a Victorian beach town known as Cape May.

From the summer I graduated high school I started my career painting murals with a company based in Atlantic City, NJ. I had always

known I would be a painter, but at eighteen I had no idea what my path was going to be, so getting paid to paint commercial work seemed like a great opportunity at the time.

However, painting for other people was not the career I wanted, so after a couple of years I began showing my work in galleries and I have never looked back.

I love to paint the female form and have always used my coastal roots as inspiration. I have shown annually at SOMA Gallery, located in my hometown, for the last six years, as well as Parlor Gallery in Asbury Park, NJ, for the last two, and I have recently shown in ARCADIA Contemporary in NY.

2da: Could you explain some of the creative process behind planning and making your images? What medium do you prefer to use?

VG: I never really know how to explain my creative process. It's really just getting things out of my head into a visual medium. There are stories I want to tell that are inspired by history, mythology, religion – anything that has influenced me over the years, but explaining my planning process is tough.

I see the work in my head running like silent movies, so my job is to translate that in paint. Once I can solidify my vision I hit the sketchbook and draw. After I have a solid sketch the fun really starts. I have models that could be suited up with crazy wardrobe and makeup or sometimes I do the modeling myself. I light my subjects, pose them; sometimes I'll use model heads or wires to hold stuff up. I will go to great lengths to get details. I approach it all in a cinematic way. My sketches are basically storyboards, then I shoot it (I usually do a detailed charcoal rendering), and then I paint. ►



● **TITLE:** *Bad Juju*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 14" x 16"
YEAR: 2014

● TITLE: *Siren*
MEDIUM: Oil on linen
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2013





● **TITLE:** *The Presentation of Leviathan*
MEDIUM: Oil on linen
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2012

The most important part, however, is the painting. I go about making a painting in a very traditional way. I build my own canvases or prime my own panels, whatever I plan to paint on, and then I just paint. I prefer oil paint mostly because of the richness and life to it, but I do work in watercolor and charcoal from time to time, as well. When I can, I've been squeezing in working from life for both the challenge and the nostalgia.

2da: Cinematic reference and dark twists of humor are often apparent in your work (which I love!), not only in subject, but in your color palette. What is your favorite series to date and what was the inspiration/story behind it?

VG: Thank you. I love film and I think of my paintings as stills from a film. It's like the best part of a movie visually with the whole story in one frame. I dig that, and that's the goal.

I don't know if I have a favorite series. My work is always evolving, specifically the portraiture, but I would say my most cinematic series is *The Nemo Project*. These four pieces, which ended up becoming a collection of self-portraits, reflect inspiration gleaned from Verne's *20,000 Leagues*, and having been born and raised at the beach, the sea is a recurring theme that creeps its way into my work.



● **TITLE:** *Neversink*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 23" x 24"
YEAR: 2014

“Composition, color, application, and subject are the fundamentals you need to think about when making a painting”

The Nemo idea came late to me and completely out of nowhere, so bodies were needed fast and the one person most available to model was myself, and my wife for the final piece, *The Seduction of the Nuns*. I also found inspiration in some of NC Wyeth's black-and-white paintings for *Treasure Island*, and the films of Ed Wood with their post-war era atmosphere.

So, I put together these elements to tell a story of a Captain: a gnarly seafarer who hunted down a mythic beast, displayed it, sold it off, and finally reveled in his reward by indulging in a fine stout, and seducing a bunch of nuns. With that said, it was a lot of fun, but I'm always proudest of my most recent work though. I'm always trying new approaches, paint application, and technique.

2da: You use really striking hyper-realistic imagery and compositions in your images. Do you have any advice for artists hoping to make more eye-catching work?

VG: I don't know if that is something you can give advice about or teach. I'm always looking for the most dramatic composition I can picture in my head without cluttering an image with unnecessary information. Composition is a huge part of making anything, especially a painting. Composition, color, application, and subject are the fundamentals you need to think about when making a painting.

I'm a big 'less is more' fan and I try to not give away the big picture in my work. There is something very intriguing about leaving something for viewers to discover in their own right. Be truthful with yourself about your vision and stick to what will make your work honest. And honesty resonates.

2da: Finally, what are your big aspirations and inspirations? And what can we expect to see from you in the future?

VG: Well, I feel very fortunate that I'm able to do this everyday, but my biggest aspiration is to continue to get better and grow at my craft. I'm my worst critic, so there is an endless supply of knowledge out there on painting to learn. I'm always inspired by the great masters of old, as well as many contemporary artists. I'd love to sit down and paint with many of them and learn some new tricks.

● **TITLE:** *Neversink*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 23" x 24"
YEAR: 2014



As far as what's going on with me, I will be showing two new pieces with ARCADIA Contemporary at the LA Art Show in January, as well as exhibiting one new work with ThinkSpace Gallery at the Honolulu Museum for the show POW! WOW! in February. I will also exhibit a few new works at Parlor Gallery this summer as well

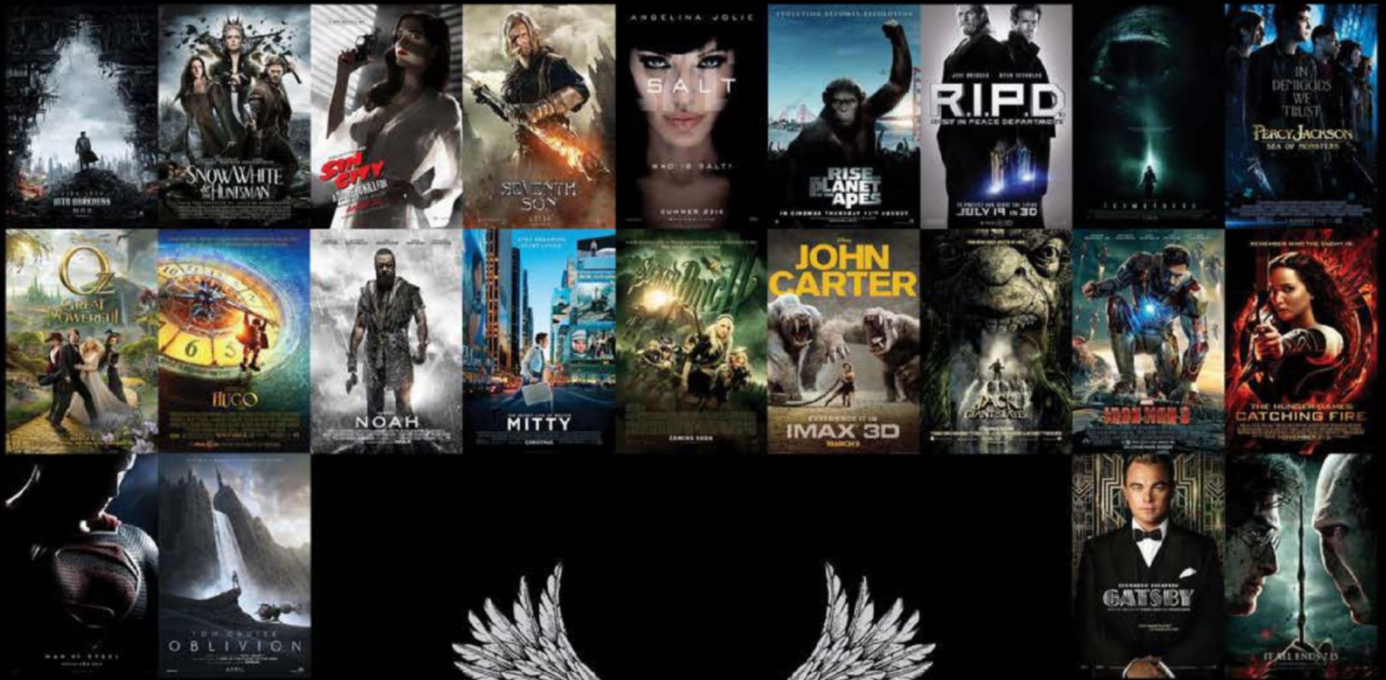
as a solo exhibition in my hometown of Cape May, NJ in August at SOMA Gallery.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to 2dartist! ●



● TITLE: *The Seduction of the Nuns*
MEDIUM: Oil on board
DIMENSIONS: 40" x 60"
YEAR: 2012





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A selection of our Alumni's achievements, congratulations to them all.

LENA RICHARDS

Sketchbook

Illustrator Lena Richards has an eye for the surreal and otherworldly. Here she gives us a peak at her unique sketches, explorations and inspirations.

The Artist



Lena Richards
oione.tumblr.com

Lena Richards is a self-taught artist and in several years she moved through the positions of illustrator and concept artist for mobile games before arriving at the role of visual development artist for fantasy RPG games.

Explore Lena Richards' whimsical sketchbook pages...

I've never had a definitive sketchbook until lately. Because of the nature of my job that required using different styles I just used to try random techniques, mix colors and so on. Slowly, without noticing it, I started to draw my own imaginary world that has pretty consistent features – surreal, maybe weird, with some unexpected parts; a world where usual objects may have unusual use and it's a norm for that world. Suddenly instead of just drawing for practice, I started to have infinite fun with it.

A big part of it is still the exploration of existing things, like sketching animals at the zoo, because all that comes out of our mind is more or less just a mosaic from what we see or experience, so the more – the better. I spend a lot of time sketching in libraries, museums or weird shops with tiny interesting objects.

I don't really like staying home unless I paint digitally, so my workspace becomes a coffee shop when I want to draw people, or an old library in the University district of Seattle when I crave silence. All this transforms into my sketchbook.

Inspiration and ideas

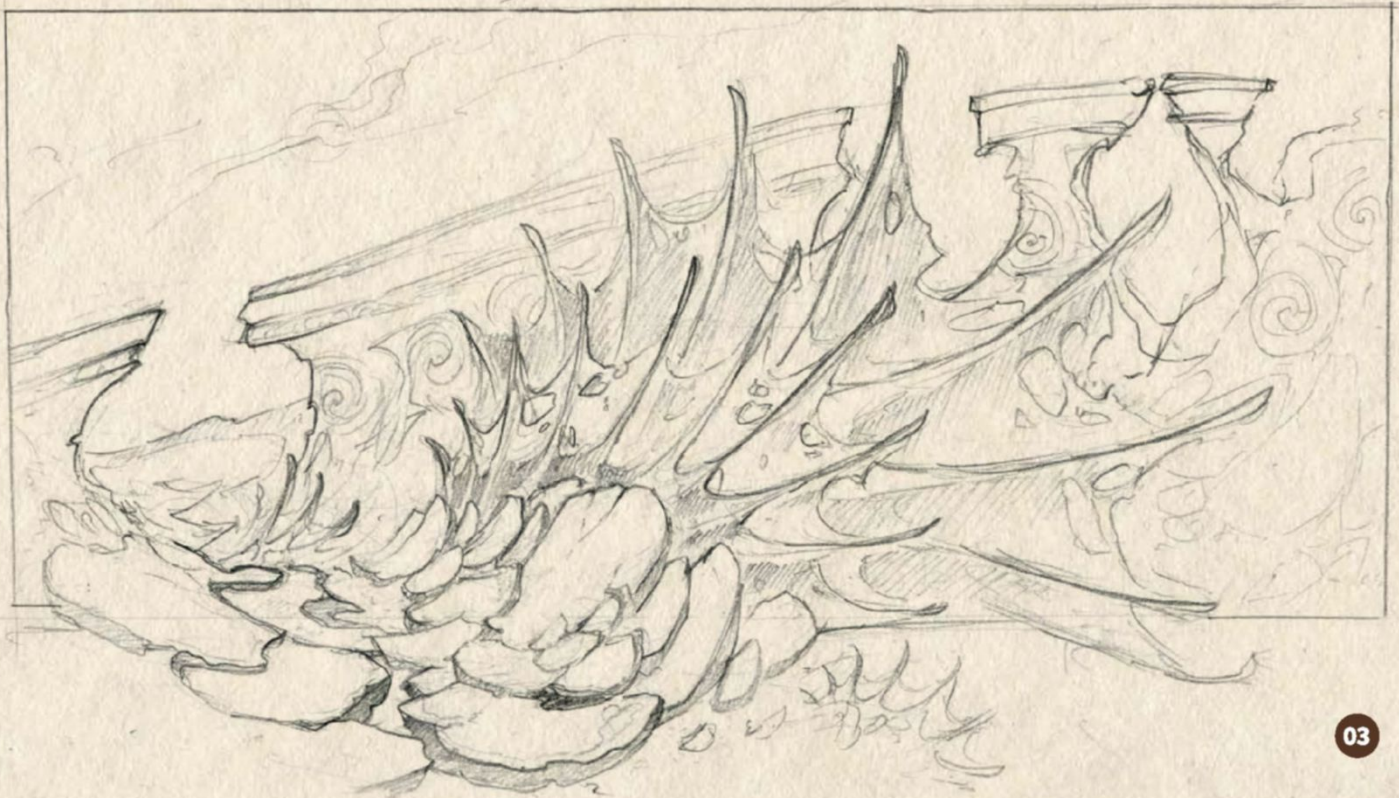
Inspiration is always around us. As Jean-Luc Godard said once: "It's not where you take things from – it's where you take them to." So I do precisely this. If I see an interesting person that, for example, looks like a bird – I make him one. I transform landscapes I see into magical places with odd shapes and spiral growing trees; I make fishes float instead of clouds... because it's fun to do! ►

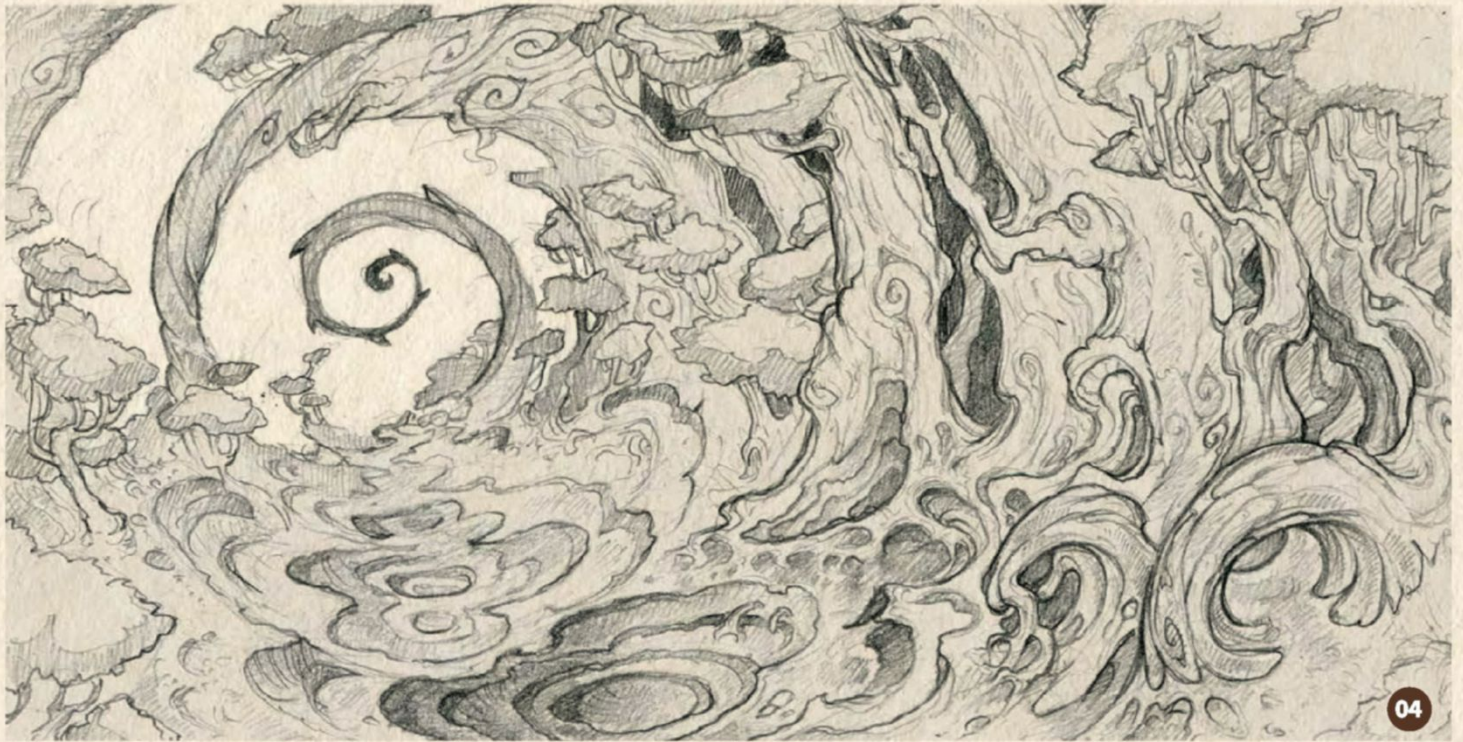


01 As a concept artist characters are a big part of my sketches. I use markers, or just lasso selections later in Photoshop, to divide patterned parts into simpler chunks for better understanding

02 Adding patterns are really important because it creates the feeling of legitimacy of any made-up fantasy race or culture

03 I like adding random animal attributes to rocks or whole scenes, because it creates the illusion of earth as a living being, maybe even breathing







06

“The layers of colored lines is usually pretty loose so I can still explore lines and have fun”

Materials

I don't really care much about the materials I use. I equally love traditional and digital sketching. It used to be I had actual sketchbooks, but I walk a lot and always take drawing with me, so sketchbooks get ruined. I started to carry around a clipboard with several sheets of regular office paper, which I could just leave at home later or give away to people if they like something I drew. I have my crazy pencil case, though – there's dozens of different pens, inks and pencils. My only tool preference is the ability to make fine lines, and I love working on patterns and surfaces. As for digital sketching, I use it mostly to work straight in color.

Sketching techniques

Drawing is a dirty fight with yourself – any trick will do. I'm just trying keep myself interested. It's pretty rare for me to use a sketch for an actual painting, and even if I do, I mostly use it as a reference and re-paint the sketch completely to get more of a fresh feeling of what I'm doing.

I'm a pretty messy drawer, so I like to use tools of different colors. I make sketches with blue or

PRO TIPS

Little fish tanks

It's pretty handy to have frame borders when we're making a landscape or multi-figure composition. It doesn't need to be square, but by adding a frame on a page you can create a sort of a fish tank which is easier to manage compositionally. You just need to fill it in with figures and objects.

Be bold

Don't get precious with your sketchbooks. This way it'll be easier for you to experiment without fear of ruining something. Every mistake can still have something to offer, so just concentrate on the benefits of your sketches. You don't have to show it to anyone; it's not an exhibit or contest.

red mechanical pencil, then ink them or make new layers of lines with a regular graphite pencil. The layers of colored lines is usually pretty loose so I can still explore lines and have fun. You see, for me sketching is all about staying entertained, because at a certain point I got really used to digital drawing which is fast and easy to fix if needed, where results of traditional drawing may turn more time consuming to obtain the result we want. So I look for small tricks that will let me solve parts of 'problems' later on and release me from pure execution. ●

04 Whimsical lines like spirals may create direction for the whole picture

05 Overlaps always reinforce the feeling of depth

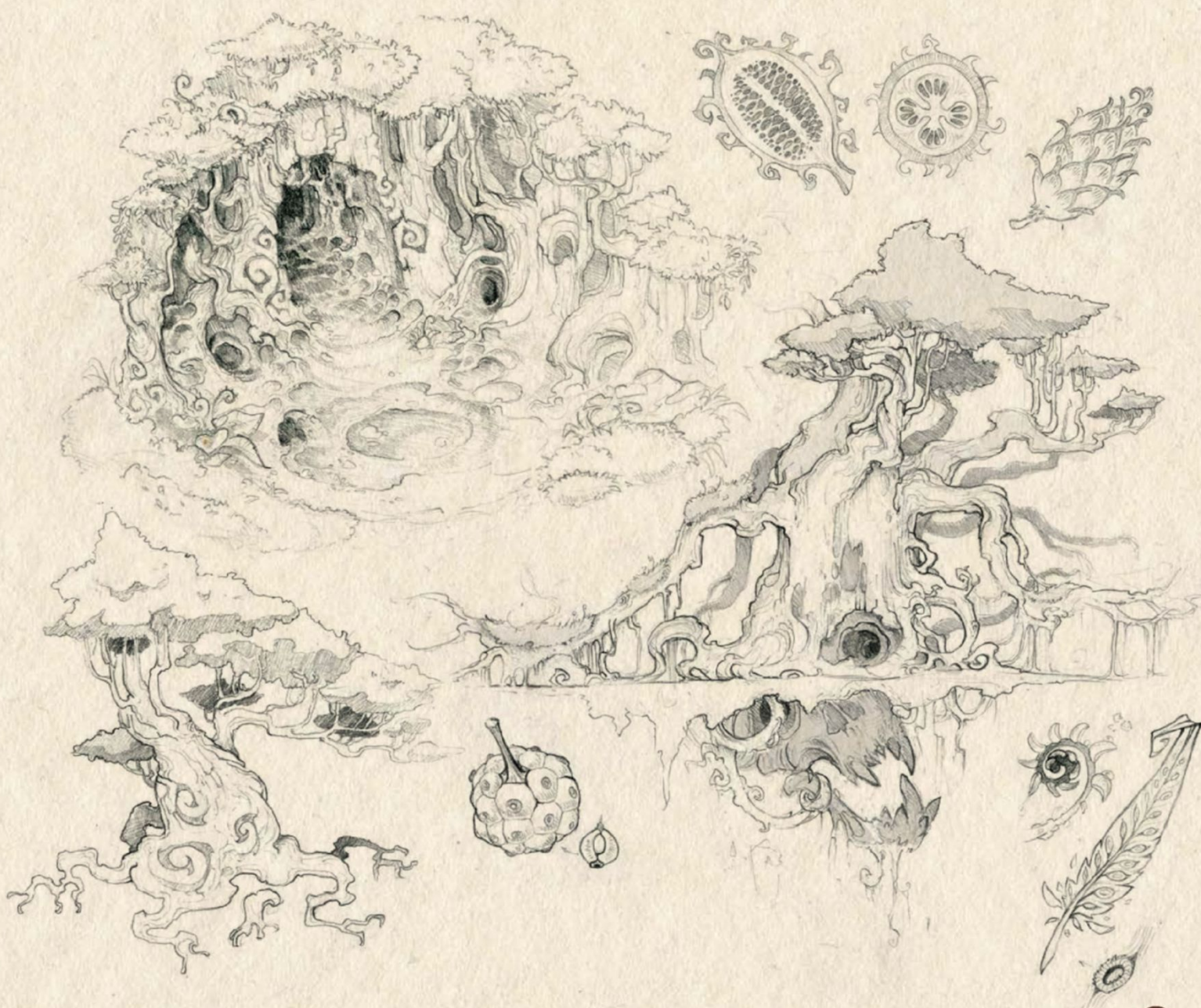
06 A pretty typical sketch for me: what if fish could fly?



07 It's a fun exercise to add an unusual gigantic object in the scene surrounded by the same objects of regular size. It reinforces the weird factor

08 An abstract landscape





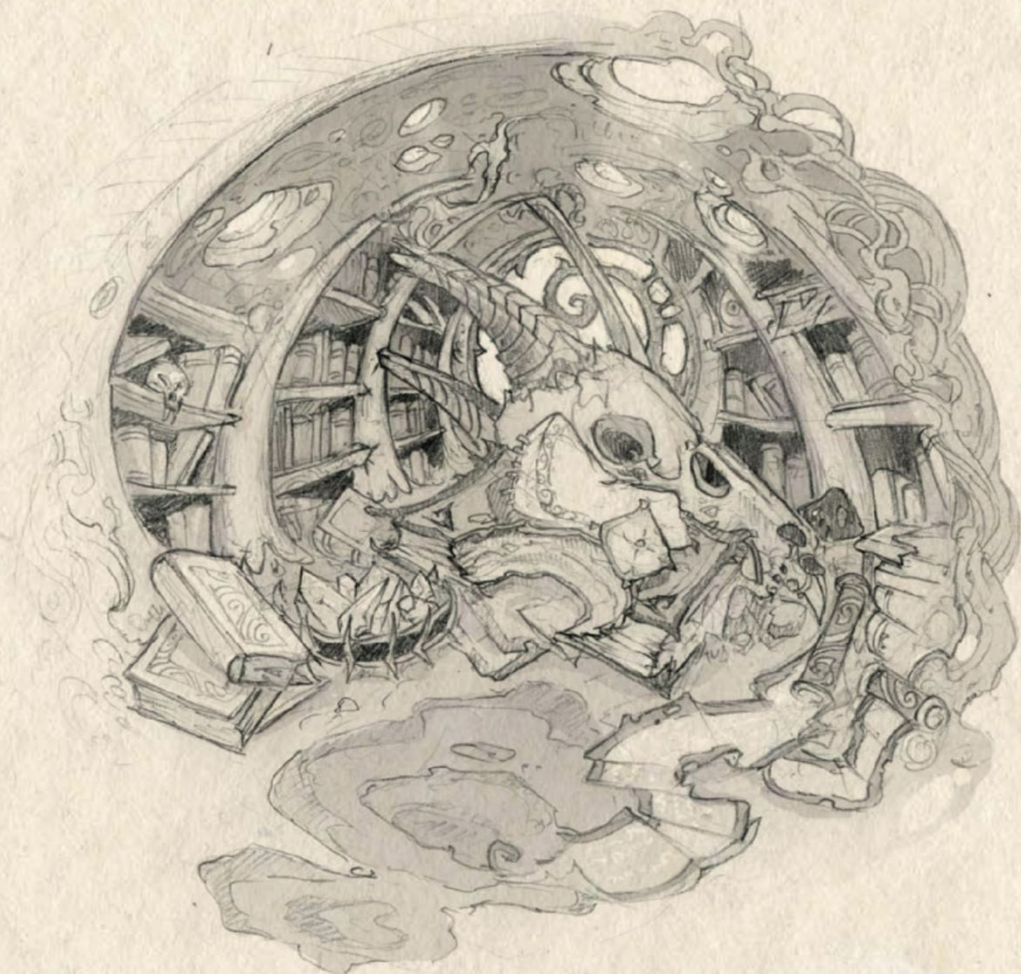
⚡ PRO TIP

Preserving feeling

I think it's pretty important for ideas to be drawn directly when we think of them. This way we transfer specific feelings to the drawing. Sure thing, we can go back to every sketch later, but it's almost impossible to maintain the same mood for a long time.

09 When I draw locations I like to think about what kind of trees would grow there, what kind of fruit they would have, even if they're not featured in the main sketch. There can always be a mystery behind what we can see

10 I always wonder what is it like to live in a tree, so I keep drawing rooms surrounded by wooden bark or carved wood, supported by twisty branches that form various decorations





11

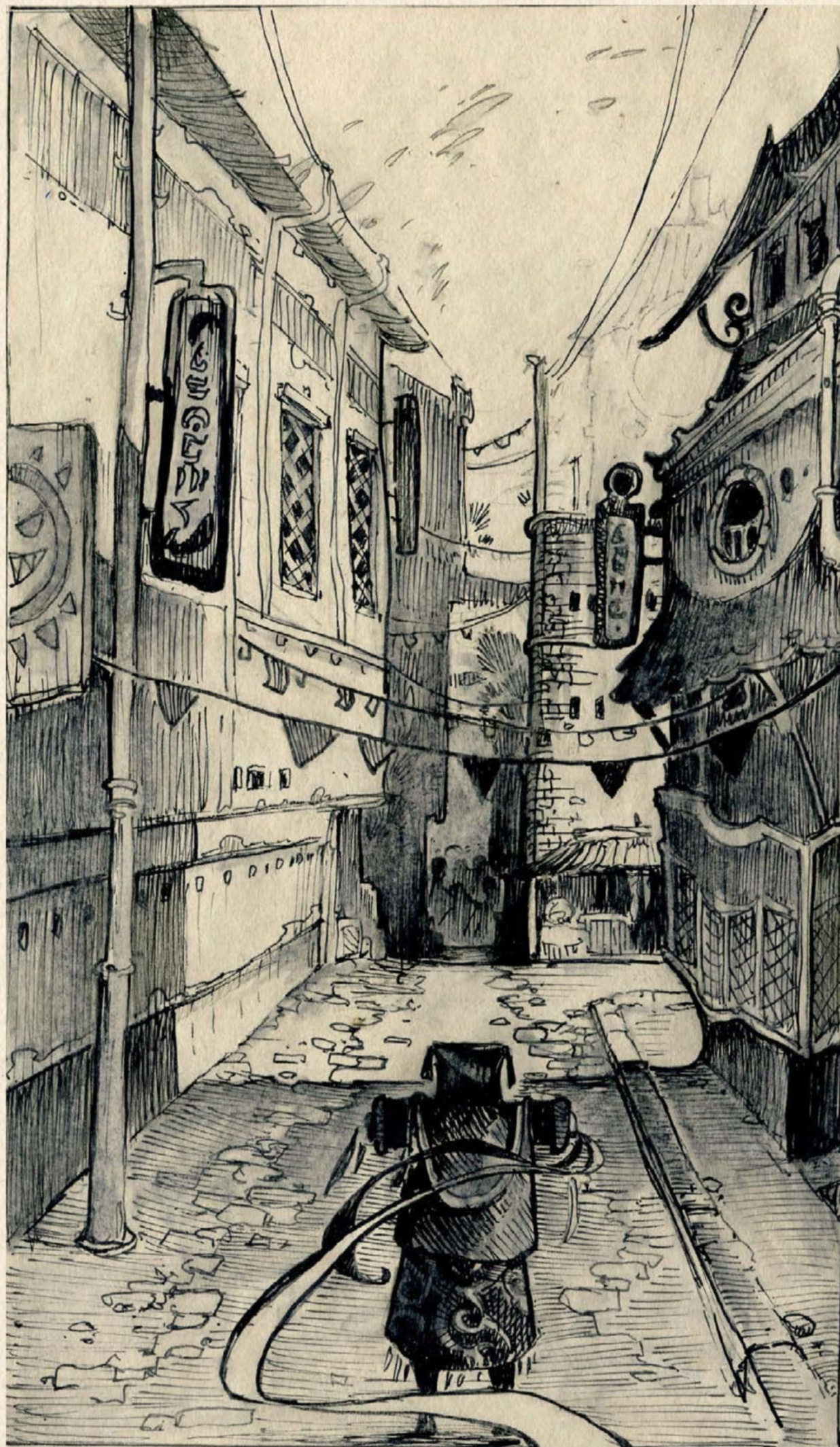
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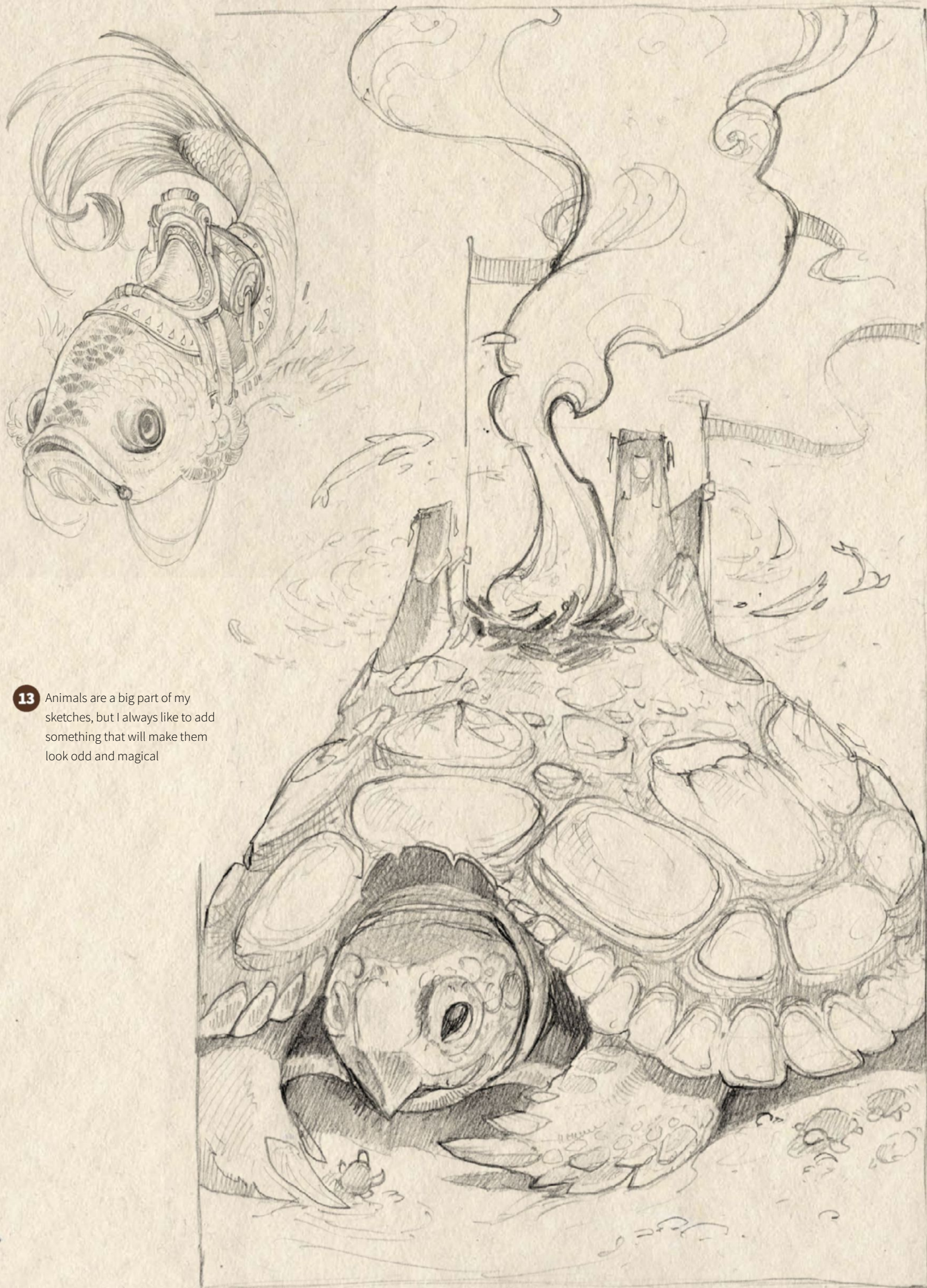
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TREPPE NOCH
OBEN WAR. IN
FENSTERCHEN,
ZAUBERIN HIN
SE STELLE
HIN UND
RAPUNZEL



11 I'm really fond of old manuscripts and illumination, so a big part of my sketchbook is filled with inked pages with fairy tales or just words arranged as an independent picture

12 I like taking characters from my previous sketches and placing them in new sketches of a different location





13 Animals are a big part of my sketches, but I always like to add something that will make them look odd and magical



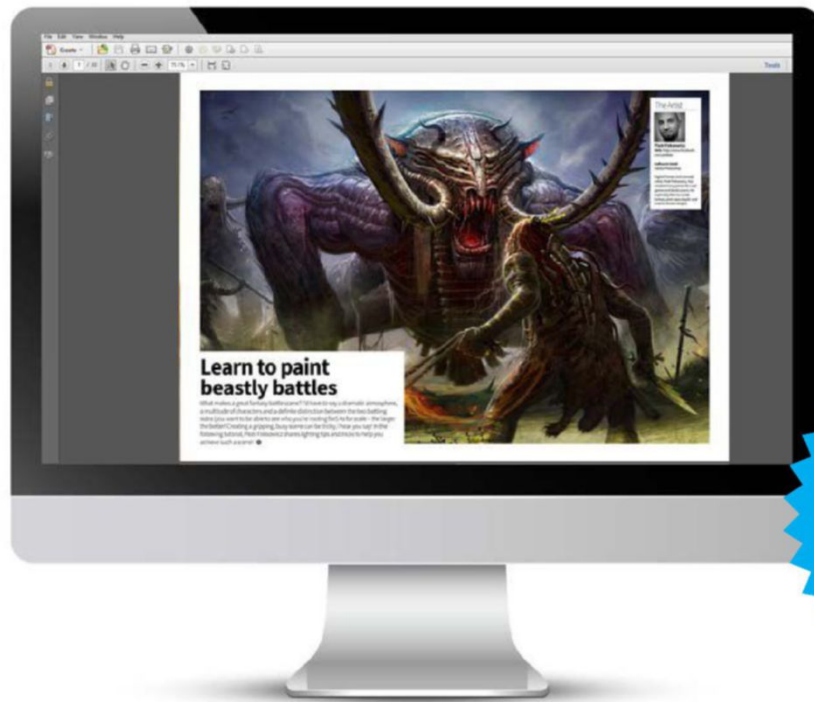
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Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



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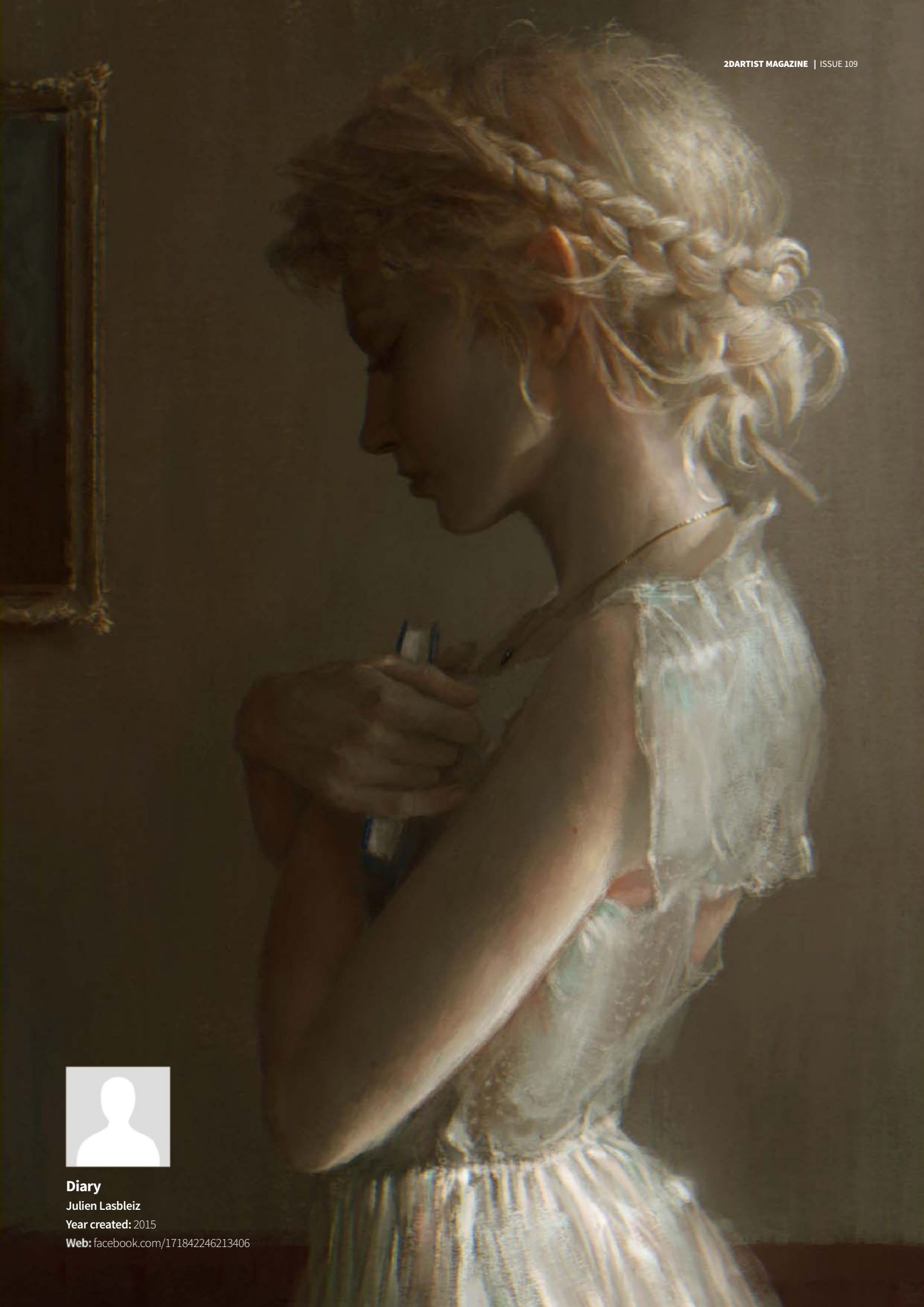
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Andrew McIntosh

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Web: artstation.com/artist/andrewmcintoshart





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Julien Lasbleiz

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Jakub Rozalski

Year created: 2014

[jakubsan.tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com/jakubsan)

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Ready for Check Machine

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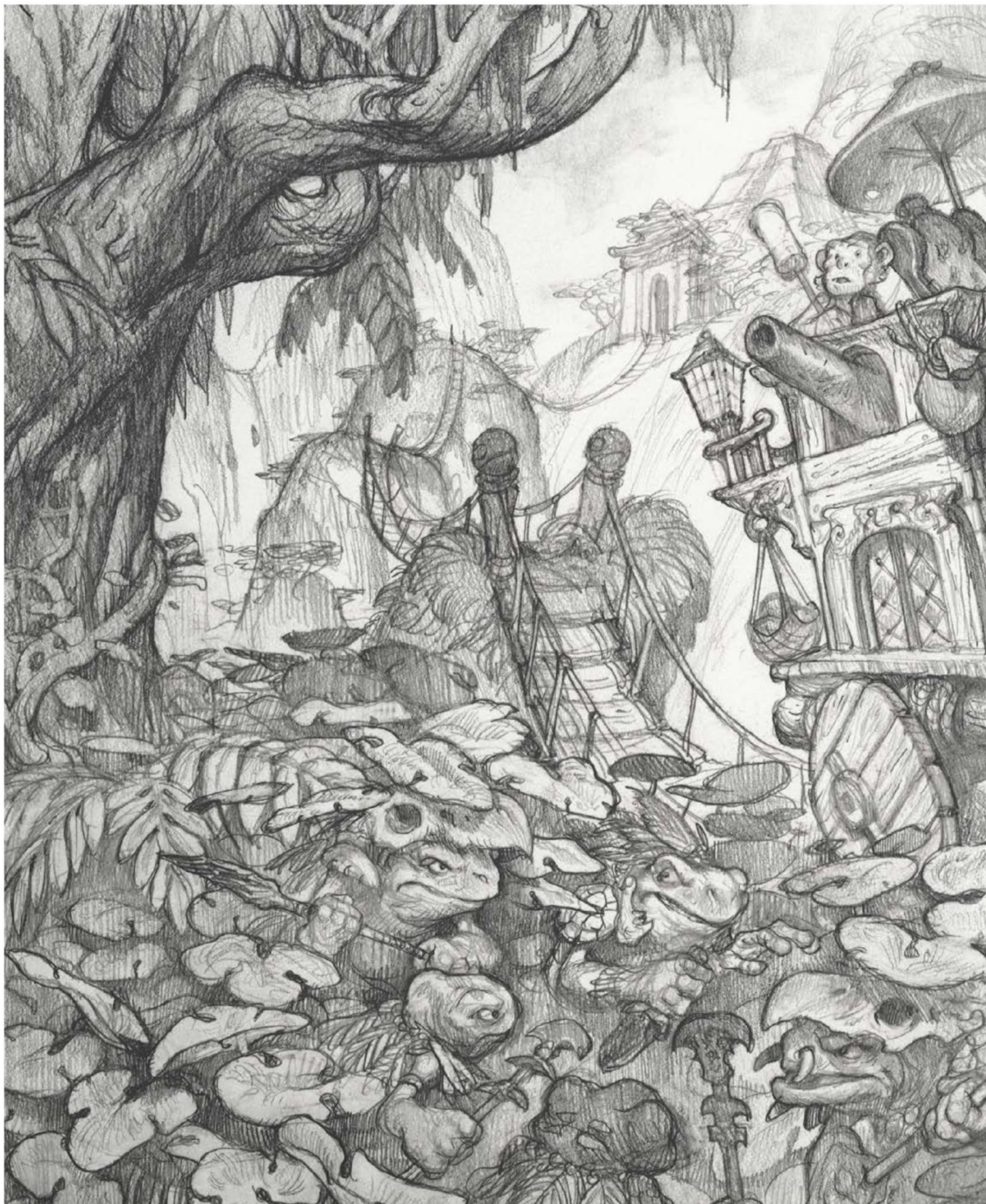
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Draw detailed scenes

Justin Gerard demonstrates how to take your finalized character and creature sketches and integrate them seamlessly into a scene [▶](#)



The Artist



Justin Gerard

gallerygerard.com

Materials Used:

Traditional tools

From the moment that Justin Gerard first learned that the crayons were meant for coloring and not for eating, he has been drawing. While Justin has always derived a great deal of inspiration from nature and human history, his favorite source of inspiration is story. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis have remained constant sources of inspiration for him throughout his career.

Discover the sketching techniques behind bringing your scene together...

Drawing is the backbone of an illustration. It is the intellectual statement, while color is the emotion. It is important to get the drawing right. In the previous two chapters (see issues 106 and 108) we developed our main characters and creatures; now I am going to show you how to take those drawings and combine them to finish a rough drawing. Then I will show you how I take this rough drawing and turn it into a final tight drawing that is ready to show to a client and also ready for the coloring stage.

Tools

Basic drawing paper (I am using Strathmore 2-ply, 500 series Bristol paper, but any smooth drawing paper will do)

Tracing paper (I used Strathmore 300 series Tracing paper)

6H, 2H, HB, 2B pencils (I used General's Kimberly pencils)

Kneaded eraser

Digital Tools

Digital Scanner, Photoshop, Wacom tablet

01 Rough drawings: I have already worked up the primary characters of my drawing but there are still a few missing support elements that need attention before we can move on to our final tight drawing. Step 1 is to draw those last missing parts.

Using the same techniques I used previously, of sketching out the shapes and refining as I go, I draw all of my missing support elements: the cart, the monkeys, the rope bridge totem, and other odds and ends that are meant to support my main characters.

These are secondary elements. They should not take away from my main figures, but they are still important and are worth drawing (and redrawing) until you get them right.

I don't spend too long here. They don't have to be perfect at this stage; they just need to work well with the scene.

Now I am ready to start combining my elements.

02 Collage work: Now that I have all the drawings I need completed, I scan everything into Photoshop.



01a



01b



01c



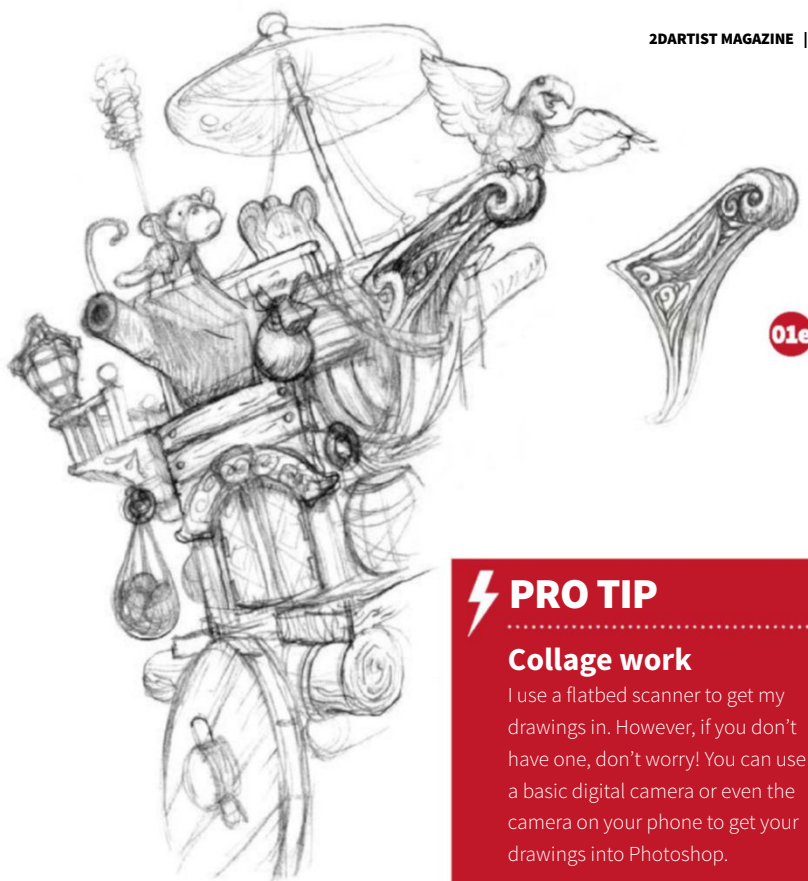
01d

Next, I open my initial thumbnail in Photoshop and make a new layer over the top of it. I fill this layer with white and set its opacity to 80%. This allows me to see it as a guide, without it overpowering my new drawings.

Then I open all of my new drawings and drag each drawing into my file. As I drag them in I change their layer types to Multiply.

I then use Image > Adjustments > Levels and drag the input sliders so that only the black line remains (and there is no paper texture). This cleans up the drawings so there isn't too much clutter or competing paper textures.

Once I have laid out all of my various elements over my thumbnail there are going to be areas that have yet to be drawn. I could print the whole file out on copy paper and finish the areas by hand, but I find that it goes faster to do this in Photoshop. So I will be staying on the computer for this stage. ►

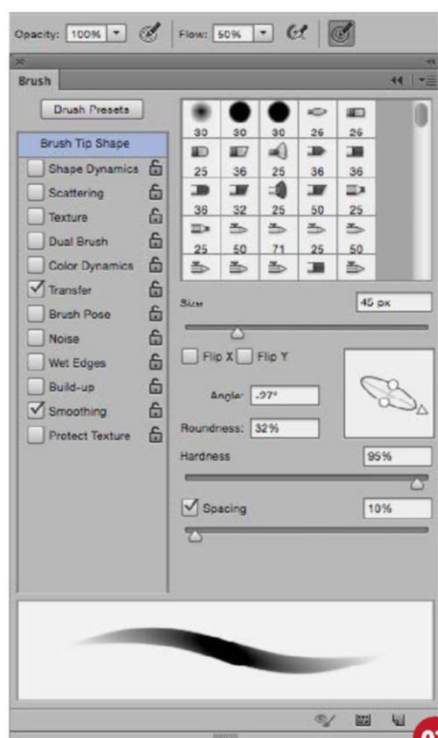


PRO TIP

Collage work

I use a flatbed scanner to get my drawings in. However, if you don't have one, don't worry! You can use a basic digital camera or even the camera on your phone to get your drawings into Photoshop.





03

03 Digital brushes: When I do rough clean-up work like this in Photoshop, I only use basic brushes without any textures or fancy brush settings. For this workshop I am using a standard circle brush, which has been squashed and angled just a bit to give the line a little life.

Please note that in Transfer I have set both Flow Jitter and Opacity Jitter to Pen Pressure.

04 Environmental additions: Using this digital brush I work in any environmental areas that I haven't drawn. The jungle plants and tree shapes get drawn in, as well as any areas on or around my figures that haven't been drawn. I also tighten up my background areas. I do not spend long doing this as foliage, landscape and backgrounds can be very, very organic. It is



04

making sure the characters are working that we are mainly concerned with.

and "Can I have a sandwich instead?" The answer is no.

05 Last minute adjustments: Photoshop has many wonderful tools for adjusting your drawing. At this stage I want to check all of my perspective lines and proportions before I move on to my final tight drawing. To do this I mirror my image using Image > Image Rotation > Flip Canvas Horizontal.

Mirroring the image will often reveal many errors to me that I couldn't see before. To fix them I will either redraw them, or select the offending area and use Edit > Free Transform or alternatively Edit > Transform > Warp to achieve what I need to so that the image looks proportional and correct (just remember to flip your canvas back when you are finished!)

Now that we know what our layout is going to be, we have one more step to do before we do our tight drawing: we need to plan out our lighting. You may ask, "But why do I need to plan out my lighting? Haven't I wasted enough time already?"

Even if you are working from a photo-reference of a place, it is still important to go through this stage so that we know how to shade and render our characters.

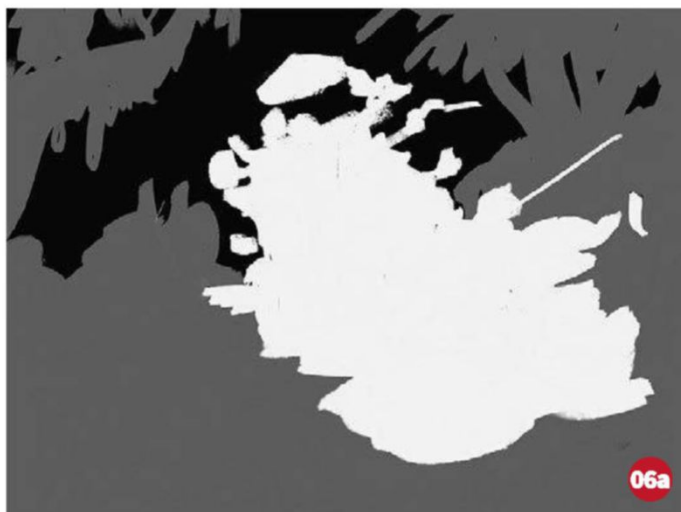
06 Lighting and value studies: To decide on my lighting I am going to make some tiny value studies of my drawing. In Photoshop I shrink my file to something very tiny to prevent myself from getting caught up in the details (for this image I shrunk my file to 600-pixels wide by 450-pixels high). Then I do several thumbnails using only black, white and gray.

I treat my compositions like they are a stage and they have a foreground, mid-ground and also a background. Do I want to darken my foreground to play up the setting in the background? Do I want to darken the background to give more dramatic lighting to the foreground?

This is where I experiment and decide. ►



05



⚡ PRO TIP

Foreground framing

In order to make our characters pop, we want to make sure that they are knocked out from the background. So if our character is to be dark, then the area behind them should be brighter, and if the area behind them is dark, then the character should be light. Making these little simple value studies helps me decide how to proceed in the next stage when I am shading and adding values. This is extremely important, especially if you plan to paint over this drawing.





⚡ PRO TIP

Work around

If your drawing is a bigger size than your printer can print, you can always print out the drawing in sections and tape them together. I then use a very hard pencil, a 4H or 6H is best because they will hold a very sharp point and give a clean, dark transfer line. I redraw over my printout, pressing firmly enough so that the pressure of the pencil makes the pastel transfer onto my drawing paper.

07 Final drawing: Now that I have completed all of my preliminary work I am ready to begin my final tight drawing. I can approach my final drawing with more confidence now that I have worked out all of the details and already dealt with any potential pitfalls.

08 The transfer: To begin with, we need to transfer our drawing from our computer screen to our drawing paper. There are a variety of ways of doing this, and you should use whatever feels the best for you. Light tables, projectors, even printing out lightly on your paper are all great possibilities. For me, I find that I get the best end results when I do a soft pastel transfer. So



09

that is what I will be using for my drawing here. Three simple steps to do a soft pastel transfer:

- First, print out the drawing on copy paper
- Second, make a transfer sheet by rubbing a soft pastel (any dark color you like) on tracing paper so that it completely covers the surface. (Blow off remaining dust)
- Third, place the sheet of tracing paper face down on the drawing paper and place the

printout over this and tape the top of the paper down to the drawing surface (this way you can lift it up to check the transfer and not have to worry about the drawing or transfer getting out of alignment). You are now ready to transfer.

09 Drawing: I begin drawing with a 2H pencil to lightly reinforce my transferred lines. Once I have established my lines, I go over them with a HB pencil to darken them. ▶

⚡ PRO TIP

Setting up: The smudge patrol

Smudging can be a real pain to have to clean up and if you aren't careful you can even accidentally rub away your carefully copied lines. There are two tricks will help prevent this.

1. Place a few sheets of paper underneath your hand while you draw. This is enough to prevent you from smudging the lines underneath
2. Work left-to-right as I am doing here. (Or if you are left-handed, work right-to-left)



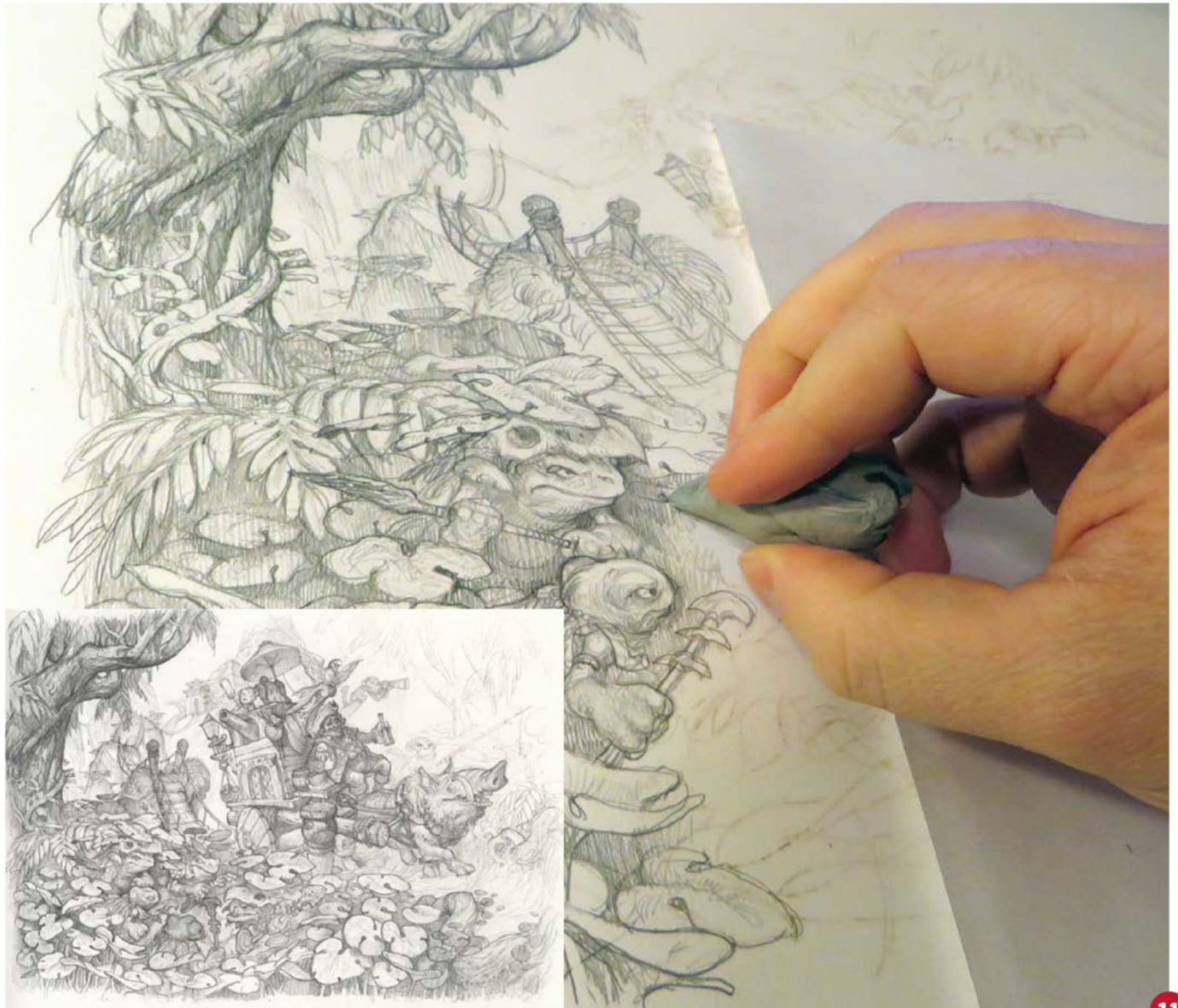
10 Shading: For shading I tend to prefer using hatch-lines. These allow me to give some sense of movement and texture. Usually I will save the majority of my shading for after I have drawn all of my lines, but since this is a larger piece and I know very well what I want my values to be like eventually, I am going to shade as I go along instead.

Whenever I approach deep shadow areas that need to read as black I switch to a 2B pencil; if pressed firmly it can achieve very rich darks.

11 Erasing: Since I have already worked out my drawing ahead of time, I will not need to make many corrections as I go along. Everything is pretty predictable. However, the eraser is for more than just corrections. You can draw with it as well. For my frogman here I have shaded in most of his face very lightly using my 2H pencil. Now I go back in with a kneaded eraser and 'draw' out some of the highlights. This trick



10



11



12a



12b

“The area between full shadow and full light is where texture can be best observed”

will allow me a greater level of control over areas that require more refined and subtle rendering.

12 **Texture in different lighting:** As in previous tutorials I am using the edge of my pencil (instead of the tip) to add in larger areas of deep shadow. This keeps the detail in those areas very murky. Shadows should always be murky! But when I get to where the shadow transitions from dark to light, I will switch back to using the tip of the pencil.

Why all the flipping of pencils?

Areas that are transitioning out of deep shadow and into light are best shaded with hatch-lines (or any sharper line) because hatch-lines can better give us the illusion of texture there.



12c

In real visual observation, the area between full shadow and full light is where texture can be best observed. Full light minimizes texture and full shadow does not show it at all. Thus, we want to

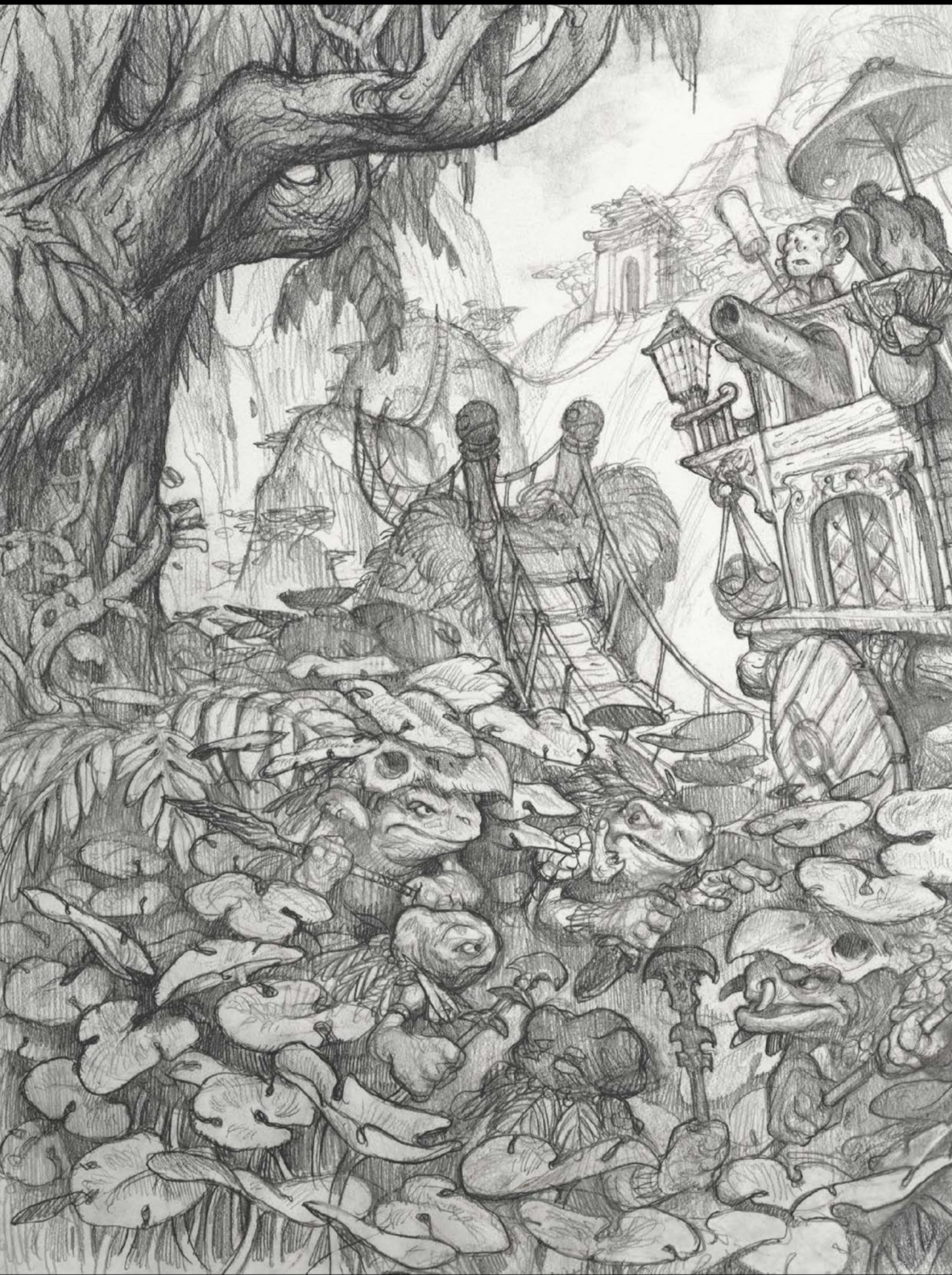
keep our shadow areas clear of texture, our full light areas very lightly rendered, and our spaces in between, detailed and sharply rendered. ●

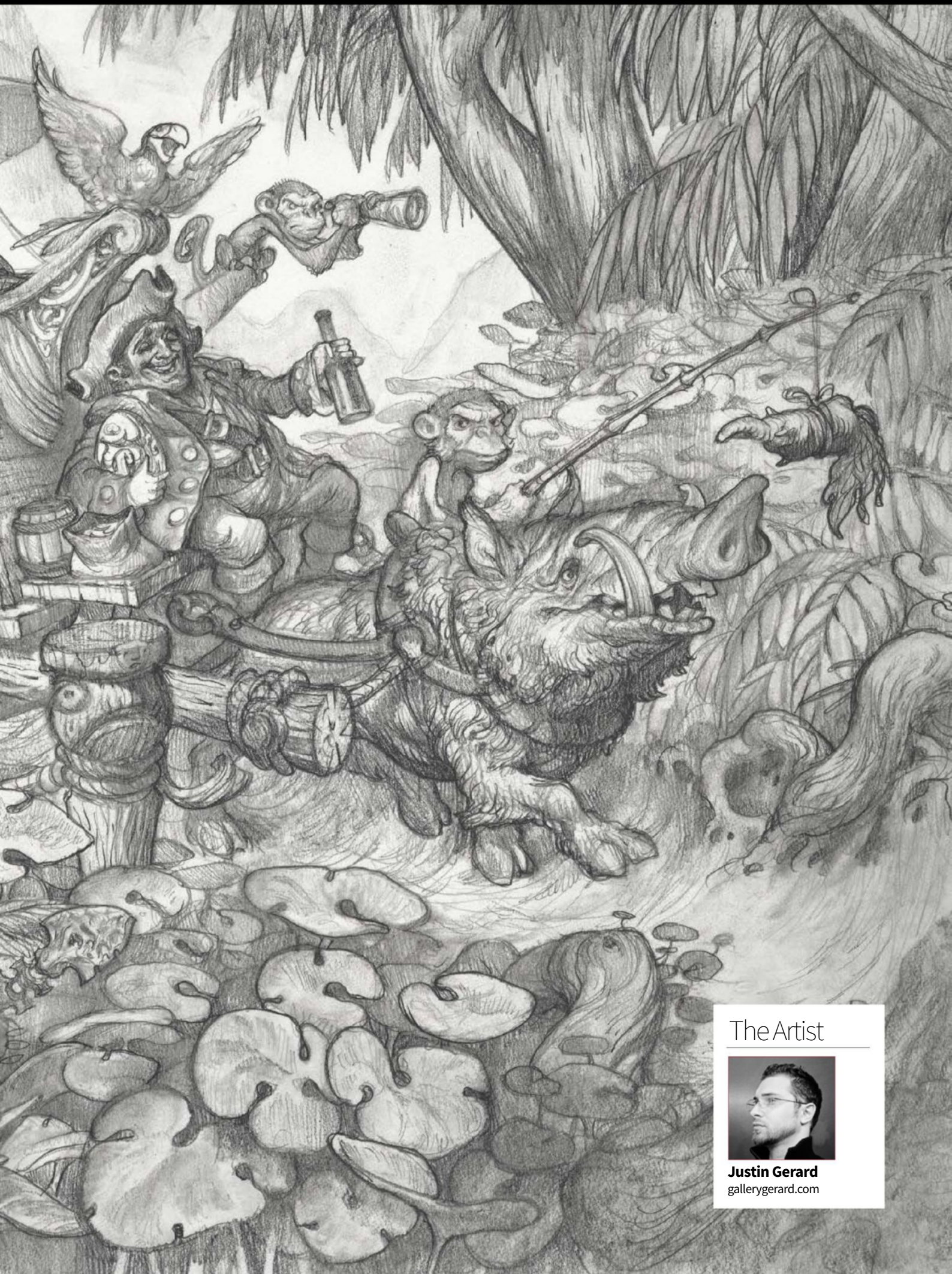
⚡ PRO TIP

Drawing the background

In my value studies I decided that I wanted my background to be very light. To achieve this, I have simply drawn with only the 2H pencil and left out the darker pencils. As I go about rendering the background, I am keeping in mind the rules of Aerial Perspective. For our drawing purposes here this means that as my scene recedes into the distance the overall contrast decreases and there is less and less observable texture.







The Artist



Justin Gerard
gallerygerard.com

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Issue 109 | January 2015

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109

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The Artist



Marisa Lewis

3dtotal.com

Software Used:

Photoshop

Marisa Lewis is a freelance illustrator and resident at 3dtotal HQ. She'd like to make a picturebook one day.



Paint snowy environments

Marisa Lewis guides you through a step-by-step tutorial on how to paint a snowy landscape in Photoshop using a selection of simple brushes and useful techniques. ▶



Learn how to paint simple landscapes in Photoshop...

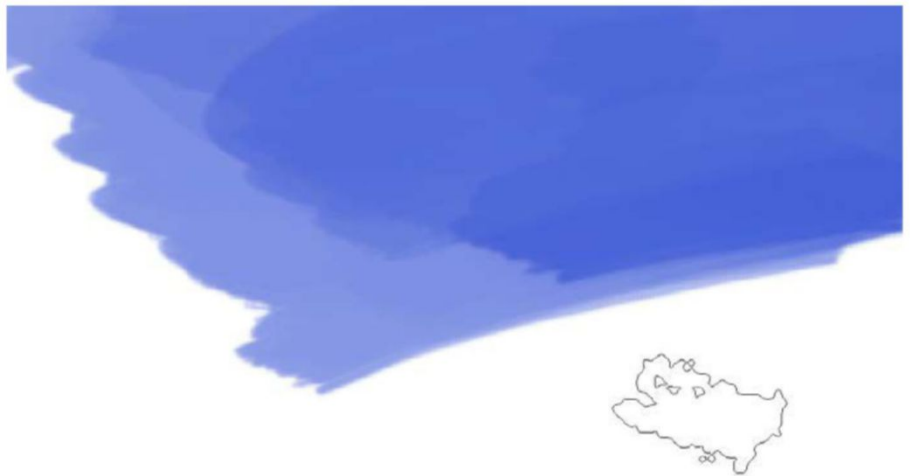
In this tutorial, we'll be looking at how to paint a quick snowy landscape in Photoshop, with a selection of basic brushes and tools that should be accessible to any Photoshop user. We'll be building the image up from simple blocks of color, implementing some visual tricks to create a sense of scale and distance, and adding features to the landscape with the Lasso tool.

Before opening Photoshop, I start out by looking at some reference images of snow, mountains, clouds, and frozen lakes, which I'd advise you to do as well. Snow is never quite the color you think it is!

01 Making a start: I open a new canvas, make a new layer, and scribble out a big blue patch for the sky. My brush of choice here is Photoshop's default Chalk brush, with Shape Dynamics and Other Dynamics turned on for a more blending-friendly result. This stage is about filling space and making shapes, not painting details, so you'll want a pretty huge brush.

A bright white canvas can be distracting, so I fill in the remaining space with gray where the snow and mountains will be. I also blend the sky more, using the Eyedropper tool (Alt-key) in order to pick colors quickly.

02 Blocking in some mountains: With the same brush at a smaller size, I fill in the simple block shapes of the mountains to get an idea of the landscape, then use a purple-gray color to define some basic shadows. I want the sun to be in the upper-left of the image, where the sky is lighter, so the right-facing sides of the mountains will be in shadow.



01

You can try playing around with different shadow shapes to see how they give the impression of different ridges and rock formations. A simple shape can imply a lot, even at this early stage.

03 Blending the mountain shadows:

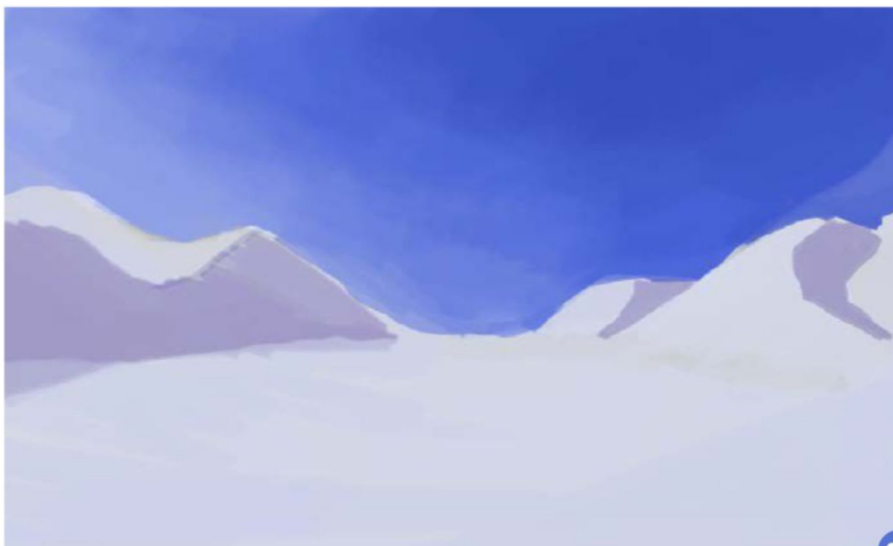
To make the mountain ranges look

“Think carefully about where you soften the shadows and where you keep them sharp”

more like they're rising out of the ground, we'll start blending the shadows downwards into the central valley. Think carefully about where you soften the shadows and where you keep them sharp, since it will change the shape of your mountains (or at worst, will probably make them look all wrong).

For example, the softer gradient shadow on the left side implies a gentle slope with no jagged peaks and edges. The harder edges on the peaks give the impression of more severe ridges, where only one side catches the sun.

04 Scribbling in some rocks: With a purple-brown color, I add some scribbled shapes to the mountains, imagining where bare patches of rock might be. If you look at images of even the snowiest mountains, you'll find there are rocky outcrops or areas where chunks of snow have fallen away. You don't need to



02

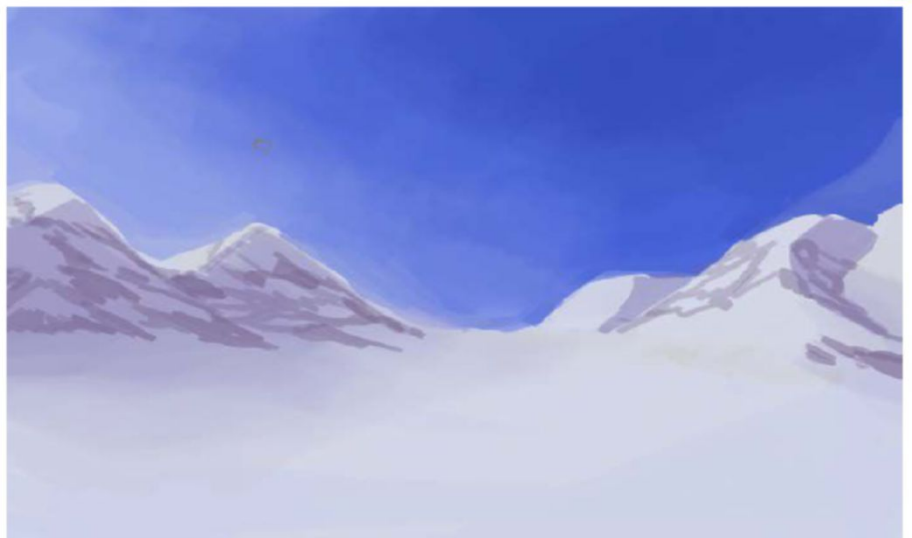


03

“If you look at images of even the snowiest mountains, you’ll find there are rocky outcrops or areas where chunks of snow have fallen away”

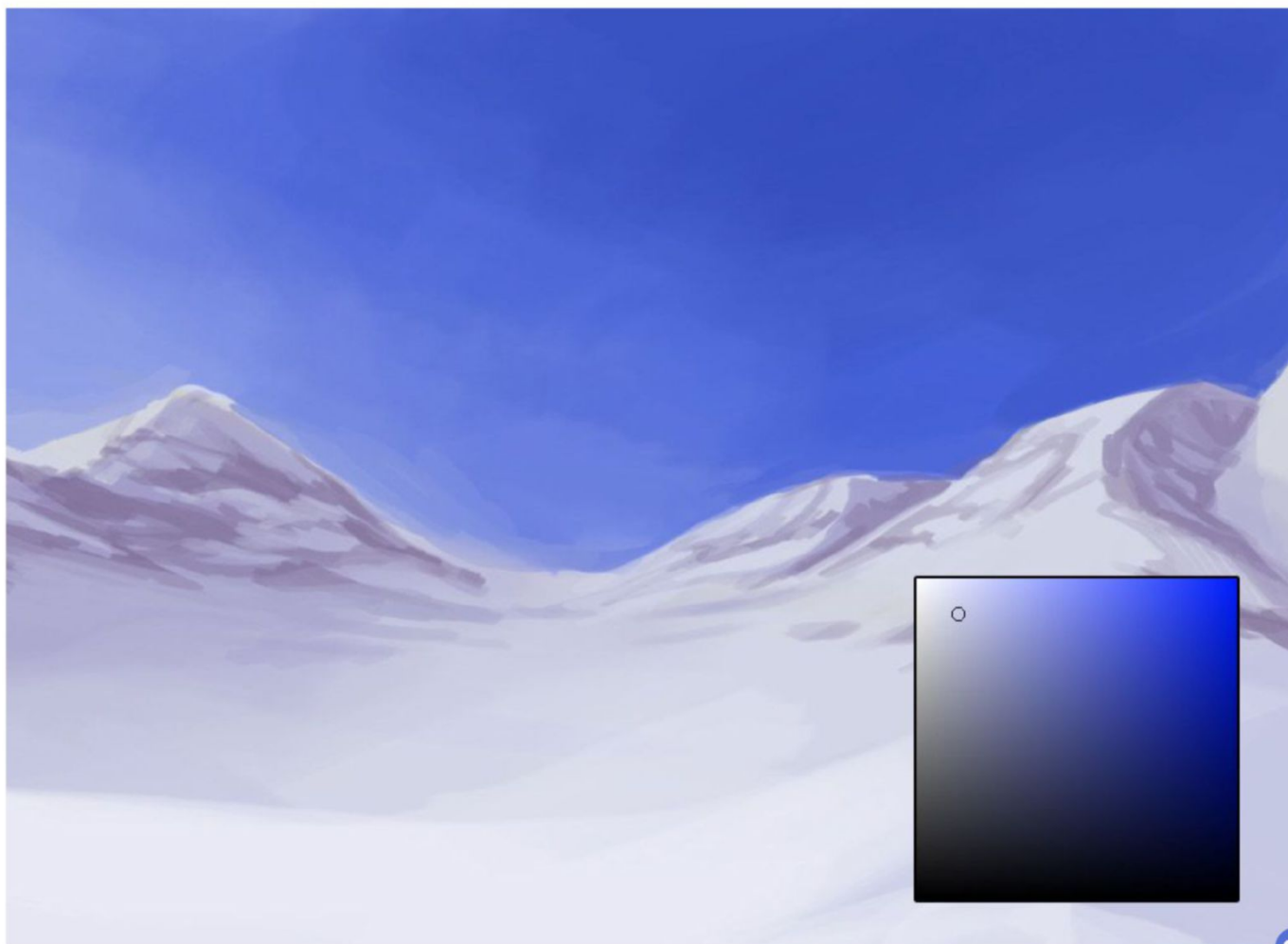
be too precise, but try to follow the forms you established when you laid down the shadows.

With the same Chalk brush at a fairly small size, I start to color-pick and blend in the rocky areas. Don’t blend them to death, or the mountains will be too blank and smooth again, but make them more subtle and give the impression of some snowy ridges and lumps. The foreground’s looking a little empty, so I extend a faint snow drift into the corner of the image. ▶



04

- 01** Use Photoshop’s Chalk for most of the sketching stage
- 02** Defining the outline of the mountains
- 03** Blending the mountain shadows
- 04** Add some variation to your snowy mountains with rock detail



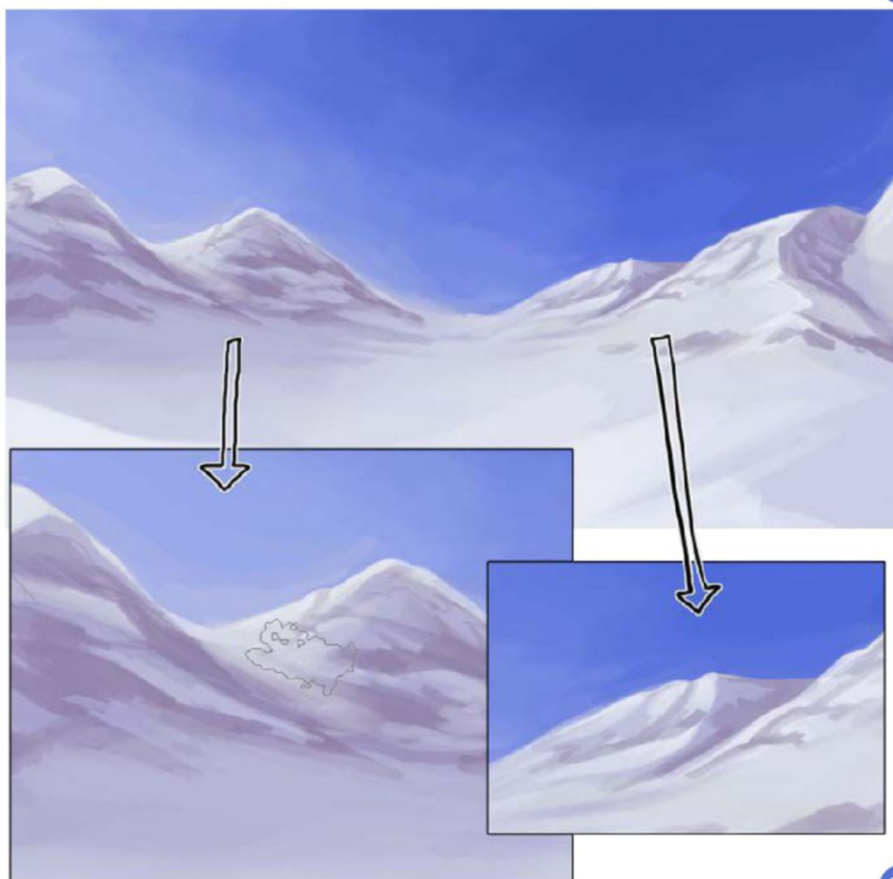
05

05 Foreground snow: Add a swish of snow to the foreground to create some interest. Since it's near the viewer and out in the open, catching the sun, pick a brighter color for your snow – but not white! Once you've gone for pure white, there's nowhere left to go. I opt for a desaturated blue-gray that's still light, but not overly bright.

06 Mountain clean-up: Now, with the brush at an even smaller size – but not so small that you have to scribble a lot – zoom in close to the mountains and start to tidy up the details. I wasn't too pleased with how sharp the valley between the left-hand mountains was, so added a soft patch of light where the sun would be shining through them.

I make the ridges along the tops of the mountains more crisp, standing out more clearly against the sky, and paint over any scruffy patches left over from the early block-in. Adding a light contour along the spine of a snowy ridge can really make it pop.

07 Cirrus clouds: I'd like to add some wispy cirrus clouds to our blue sky, so it's time for a change of brush. I select the default Soft



06

Round airbrush and turn on Other Dynamics > Opacity Jitter so it's not too heavy-handed.

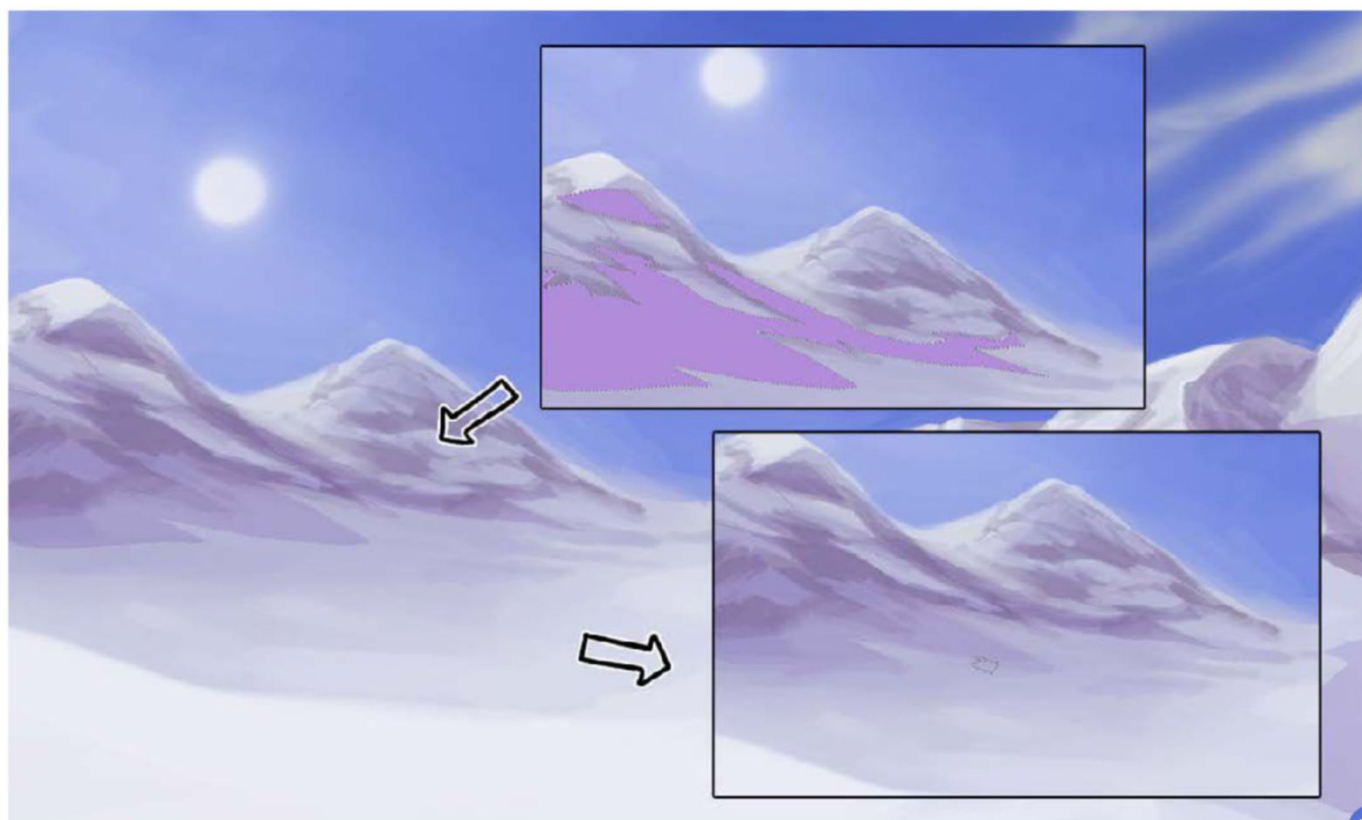
Now make some long, soft wisps of cloud. I use a very light white-yellow color, so that the clouds aren't the same white as the snow. Add definition to the clouds by painting layers of extra wisps, reducing the size of your brush as you go. Don't go into too much fiddly detail, though, or they'll become too sharp.

08 **Some sky tweaks:** Your sky should be nearly done. Add a bright sun – still not pure white, but close! – to give everything some focus. If you can't freehand a satisfactorily neat circle, just create the sun with a mouse-click and then paint over the edges so that they don't look too mechanical.

I also take a moment to smooth over some uneven patches of sky, but not so much that it becomes too airbrushed. Keeping some visible brush strokes and scribbles adds a bit of personality to your work. ▶

- 05** Add some shapes to the foreground
- 06** Tidy up the mountains so they stand out against the sky
- 07** Sketching the basic shapes of the clouds
- 08** Adding some extra touches to the sky





09



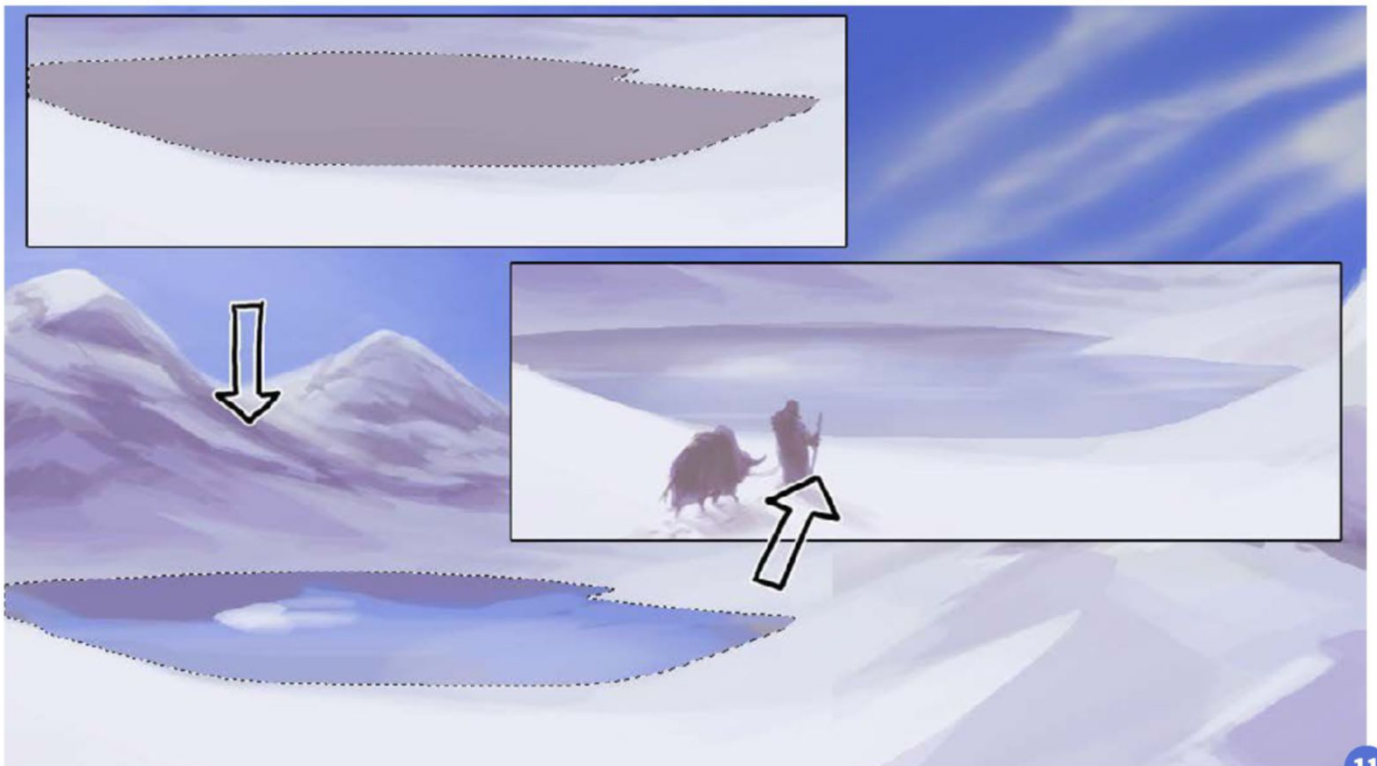
10

09 Creating sharper shadows: The mountains could do with looking more rocky and angular, so let's introduce some sharper blocks of shadow to make them more distinct. Use the Lasso tool to select areas you'd like to fill with solid shadow. I select the

shadowed sides of the mountains, then fill them in with a light-purple color on a new layer. I don't want everything to look too blue, and it can be assumed that sunshine is yellow – thus the shadows, being the opposite color, are purple. (Purplish shadows are a safe choice for scenes

with a natural yellowish light source, but you don't have to stick to that rule all the time!)

Set the blending mode of this new shadow layer to Multiply, then drag the Opacity down so they're not dark and harsh, but still distinct. I go for 25%.



11

Some of the edges may look *too* sharp and jagged now, so paint over them to blend them in, bearing in mind the hard shadows and rock formations you defined earlier.

10 Establishing scale: The mountains should be looking more complete now, but there isn't much sense of their size or distance in this landscape. To fix that, and add more narrative quality to the scene, try adding some small figures in the foreground. They don't have to be detailed, just recognizable as living things.

I use the Chalk brush to sketch in the outline of a lonely traveler and his beast of burden. Don't forget to add shadows and footprints in the snow to ground them in the landscape.

11 Make a lake: Now we'll use the Lasso tool again to make the shape of a frozen lake. Draw the outline you want, and fill it with a neutral color on a new layer. At this stage you can either work with the selection still active, or activate 'Lock transparent pixels' in the Layer palette. Either method will keep you from going outside the lake's shape while you paint in some more details.

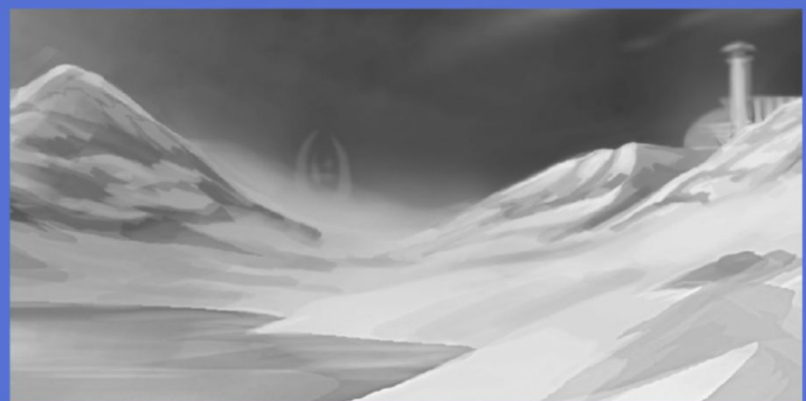
I fill in the lake with some blobs of color to reflect the mountains and sky. However, if you look up images of frozen lakes, you'll find their surfaces often aren't shiny and highly reflective at all: rather, they're white-ish and slightly opaque, like frosted glass. To go for that look, add more grays and light tones to the lake, and make the

PRO TIP

Checking tones

As you go paint, it can help to flatten everything and go to Image > Mode > Grayscale to view your image in monochrome. (Shift+Ctrl+U can also be used to remove color, but the results can look very different!) There should be balanced areas of light and dark in your image, and you should be able to distinguish the major compositional shapes from each other.

Colors can be confusing, especially with subjects like snow: you'd think the snow would be bright and the blue sky would also be bright, but that's not the case in grayscale! If you're not sure what your tones should look like, try viewing your photo references in Grayscale to see how they compare.



colors diffuse but don't overly blend them. I use horizontal strokes to differentiate the lake's smooth surface from the snow.

When you're happy with your lake, you might wish to unlock the layer transparency and paint over some of the sharper edges, so it looks more set in the surrounding landscape. ▶

09 Use the Lasso tool to make clean freehand selections

10 Adding some people or creatures helps give a sense of scale

11 Create a lake using the Lasso tool again



“Take a moment to look over the whole scene and see where it needs some extra attention”

12 **Extra details:** Take a moment to look over the whole scene and see where it needs some extra attention. I'd like to add a sci-fi flavor to the image now, guiding the viewer's eye along the traveler's path, so I add a beacon-like structure and the distant hint of a city. And a little pink star, just for fun! They're only small things, but they change the context of the whole picture.

I add some more definition to the landscape by adding some snow drifts to the far side of





the lake, and sharpening up the drifts in the foreground with some more Lasso shadows.

13 Quick final tweaks: Now we'll add some finishing touches, though it's best not to overdo them! Save a flattened version of the image, being careful not to save over your original layered file.

In the flat version, I make a new layer and airbrush patches of yellow over the foreground, which I'd like to make subtly warmer than the background. I set the layer to Multiply with an opacity of about 15%, though you might prefer another mode – play around with it.

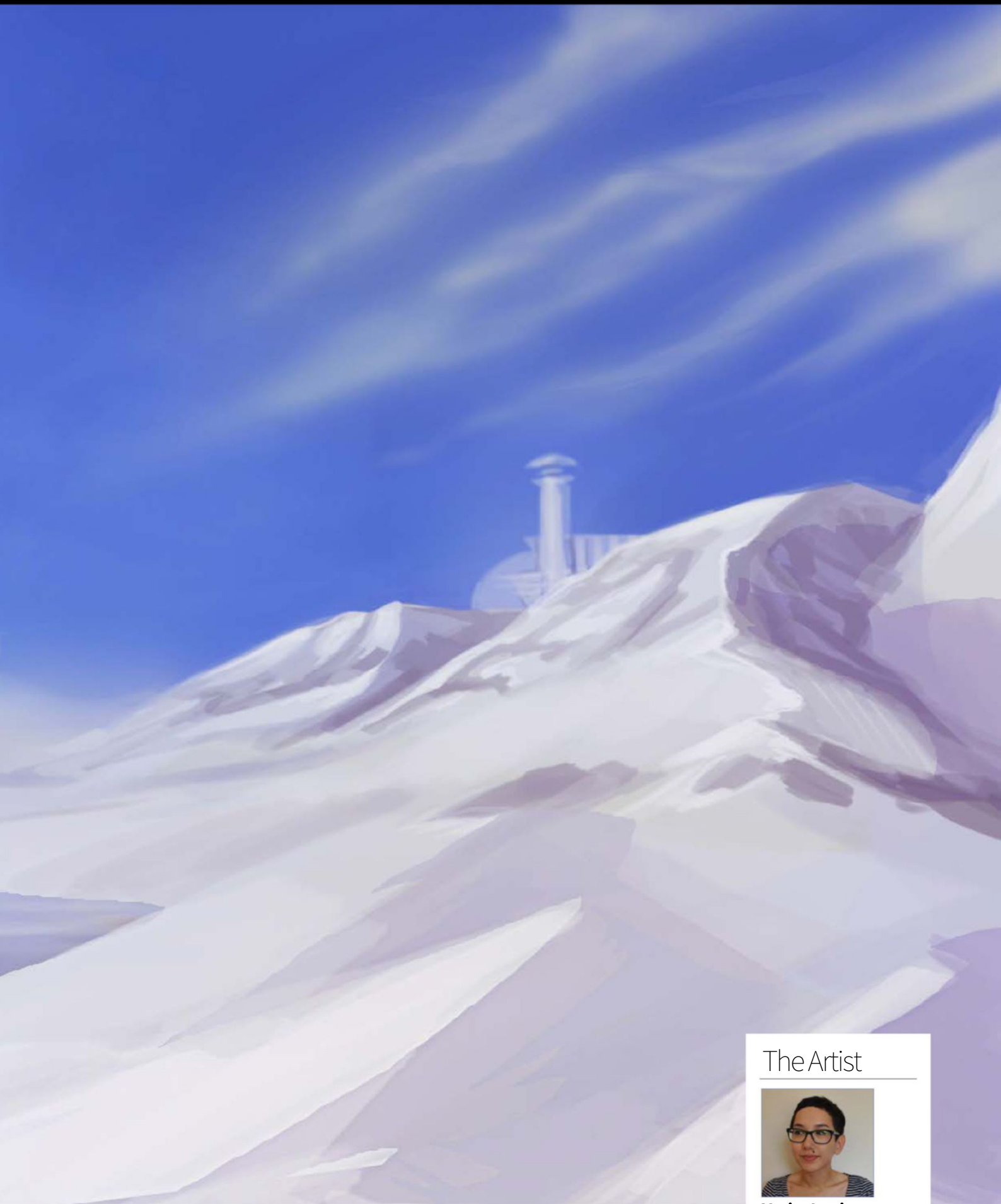
I'd also like to make the foreground crisper and the background more distant. Using the Lasso tool with Feather set to around 30px (so the edges aren't sharp), I select the foreground and use Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask set to around 30%. The other sharpen tools tend to be quite obvious and can produce weird artifacts, but Unsharp Mask can look great if you don't crank it up too high.

I then Lasso the buildings in the distance and use Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur on a low setting – again, don't overdo it or the results will stick out too much. And there we have it – a snowy landscape scene. ●

12 Finish off the landscape with some extra details

13 Making some final edits to the image





The Artist



Marisa Lewis
3dtotal.com

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Issue 113 | January 2015

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These tutorials not only provide interesting exercises for the beginner to help build a strong foundation for drawing and painting, but also provide important insights into the

”

Lois Van Baarle (aka Loish)

loish.net

beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop: characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods.

Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

The Artist



Davide Binello

vimeo.com/davidebinello

Software Used:

Photoshop

Davide Binello is a matte painter from Italy currently living and working in London. Before getting into VFX he earned a degree in Philosophy, specializing in Aesthetics and Semiotics, and Arts.

Matte paint dramatic landscapes

Davide Binello demonstrates useful and important techniques for matte painting landscapes to match the realistic and epic landscape paintings of the Masters 🎬





Davide Binello reveals invaluable techniques for matte painting landscapes...

During my formation and first professional jobs, I realized how important it is for a digital artist to carefully study the masters of traditional arts; learning their lessons about color palettes, dramatic lighting, perspective, composition and moody atmospheres is crucial if your goal is to create powerful artworks, capable of catching the eye and raising emotions.

When it comes to matte painting, landscape concept art and environment design at the Hudson River School is a huge source of inspiration for me and many other artists all around the world. This American artistic movement, heavily influenced by European Romanticism, focused on the creation of dramatically realistic yet wonderful and epic landscape paintings.

The strong idealization of nature, seen as a reflection of God's greatness, helps create an enchanted and magical atmosphere, while realism is preserved thanks to the exceptional amount of details painted, perfect perspective studies and appropriate scaling.

Technically, this is going to be a completely 2D matte painting in Photoshop. We will start by studying carefully the reference painting by Albert Bierstadt, focusing on composition and color palette, and then we will proceed to build up the image from the background sky to the foreground elements. Being a 2D matte painting, skills will involve digital painting, photo manipulation techniques, problematic matte extractions, layers organization and proper use of adjustment layers and filters.



“During my formation and first professional jobs, I realized how important it is for a digital artist to carefully study the masters of traditional arts”

01 Studying the masters: *FONS VITAE* is an homage to Albert Bierstadt's outstanding piece *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains*; in my rendition I tried to preserve some of its key features. The choice of a limited color palette, which swings from shades of desaturated violet/purple to shades of highly saturated orange/yellow, and the steep crescendo of brightness from foreground to background, creates a magical atmosphere, extremely moody, suggestive and eye catching.

Composition is absolutely perfect; all natural elements, including clouds formations, are smartly shaped in order to create curved lines that lead into the heavenly God-rays, the center

and focus of the whole painting. Lighting is strong, dynamic and dramatic, giving the piece a romantic feel. Lastly, the amount of details is incredible, making the piece extremely rich and very intriguing.

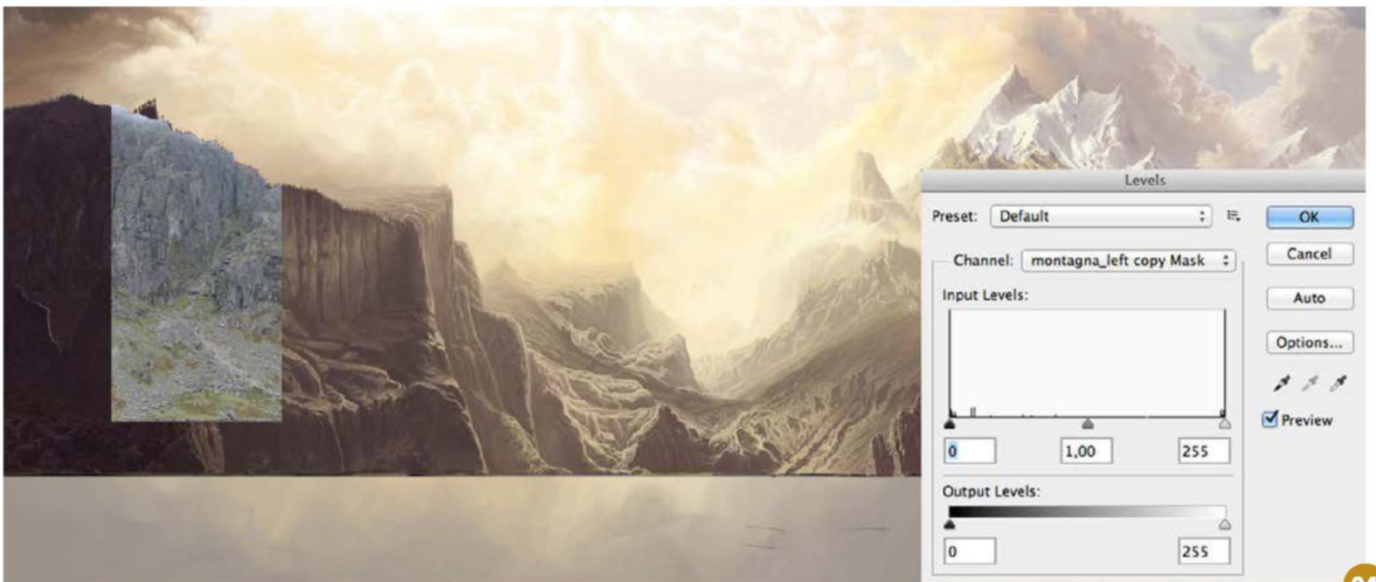
02 Suggestive cloudscape: The first step consists of creating the background of sky and cloud formations. The cloudscape in the original painting is so smartly designed that it is a crucial feature to the composition and the true key to the moody atmosphere. The main light source is coming straight from the above, upper-left direction.

Start with a desaturated indigo as a base color and a light yellow to define the complex shapes of lit clouds. Use a simple Round brush, 50% hardness, brush tip slightly squeezed into an ellipse. With different shades of the two main colors, paint 90-percent of the cloudscape; for the center and upper-right clouds, though, I use some photographic elements which can be from your





03



04

own library or easily accessible form free texture sites. Then apply Curves to color correct and do some paintovers.

03 Background mountains: From the cloudscape emerge the first layer of mountains. I use about ten photographic elements; during my research I look for pictures of rocky formations in a diffuse lighting condition, avoiding sharp shadows and over exposed areas. In doing so, you will lower the time spent suppressing darks and lights, and I obtain a nice seamless texture to use as a base.

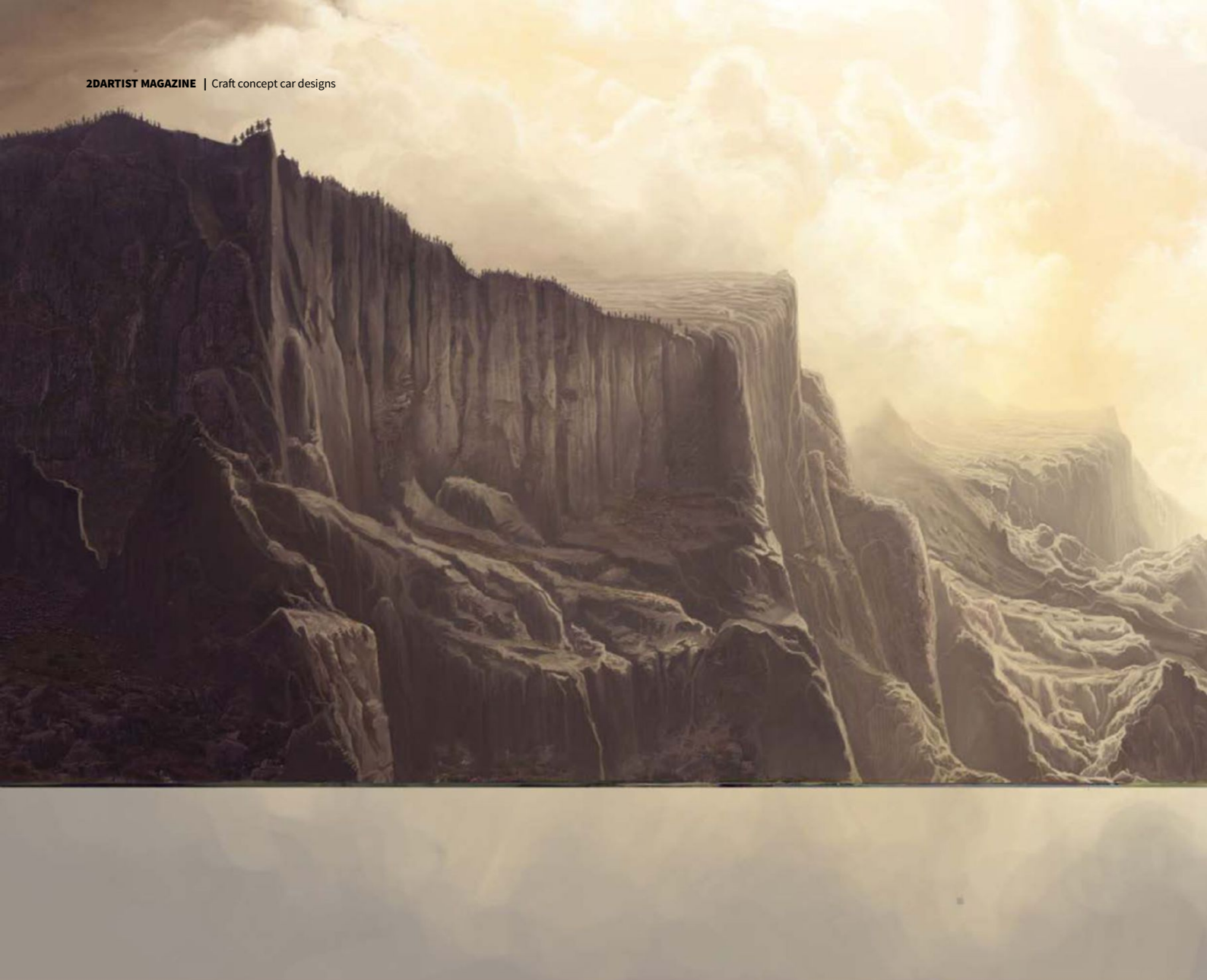
Then use Curves to color correct it and heavily re-light it with paint strokes. Color pick from the sky palette and use a simple Round brush with a squeezed tip (75% hardness) to add a lot of details and smaller rocks. I also create several layers of haze and fog, using a big soft Chalk brush with angle and size jitter on.

04 Building up the mid-ground mountains: The mid-ground main mountains have way more contrast, showing stronger shadows as well as really bright rim lights. I use about twelve photographic elements, manipulating them with the perspective and distort tools until I create a believable and coherent mountain formation. For color correction use the Curves and Levels; playing with the Output Levels' slide in the Levels' window is a really easy and quick way to match contrast between two different images.

To relight and add lots of small details, use several layers of paint as well as Adjustment layers with alpha channels coming from hand-painted masks. To create alpha channels from the painted masks simply Ctrl+click on the paint layer; this will create a selection, and then Select > Save Selection > OK. You will now find a new alpha channel in the Channels window. I find this technique really effective because it allows

you to paint lights and shadows enhancing the underlying texture instead of covering its photographic details. ►

- 01** Try tracing lines over all the main elements and you'll get a complex and dynamic pattern converging into the center of the painting
- 02** To achieve realism I don't use custom brushes for clouds, but really simple ones to better control shapes and details
- 03** Choosing the right pictures to paint on will save you an enormous amount of time and will give smoother results
- 04** Levels are a powerful tool in Photoshop and the Levels Output slide really comes in handy during photo merging



05 **A temple in the woods:** To create the woods, I use about fifteen photos, most of them single trees with peculiar trunks and odd bushes, which I then merge and color correct with Curves, Levels and basic distortion tools. The hardest part is the trees' extraction, and for this particular task I use a mixed technique; first of all I create a rough mask using the Magic Wand tool with a really low tolerance value (5-8). I then start painting inside the mask using black, white and shades between the two according to how much detail I want to recover.

All necessary relighting was done with paint layers and lots of painted branches were integrated to add detail and help the composition. The temple is a homage to classical art and philosophy.

06 **Blame the flowers!** To balance the composition, I add a foreground rock formation on top – on the left side – from which I create a flowered bush by merging some photos. At this point your file may be getting too heavy and slow due to the excessive number of visible

⚡ PRO TIP

Use simple brushes

I've been reading many tutorials about using custom, textured brushes to speed up digital painting. While it's undeniable that they are useful for some tasks (especially in concept art), I think they are quite dangerous for realistic painting since you risk losing control of the shapes you're painting, and to create recurrent patterns in textures. My advice is to stick to simple Photoshop brushes (Round or the very good Chalk ones) and customize hardness, spacing, brush's tip squeeze and angle according to which shapes you need to paint. This way you'll have complete control of your paint strokes.

layers, about 140. When dealing with complex paintings, it is crucial to keep your file clear and accessible, carefully renaming layers and organizing them in folders.

After saving a backup copy, you can then start merging layers together effectively reducing their number and avoiding confusion; Photoshop will run smoother and faster and you will save precious time. By pressing Ctrl+Shift+Alt+E, Photoshop will create a new layer, merging all the visible ones. ►

05 **Extracting trees using the proposed technique may be long and boring but gives excellent results and great control on edges**

06 **Whenever you feel like Photoshop is slowing down, just start merging layers – this will save you from crashes and data loss**



05



06



07 **Water mirror:** Creating the lake is a challenging task since merging different photographs is not an effective technique. I create a color base picking up the darkest cerulean shade from the sky. I then look for a proper water texture, just one seamless, wide photograph, and composite it as a layer on top of the base using Soft Light mode.

To add reflections, I merge all visible layers into a new one, flip it vertically, align it like a mirror's reflection below the mountains, and apply a Motion Blur filter to it (Filter > Blur > Motion Blur), set to 90° Angle and 25 Distance. Lastly I switch layering mode to Overlay and reduce the Opacity to 80%. Rocks are added as photographic elements, re-lightened with paint and color corrected using Levels and Curves.

08 **Finishing touches:** On the left side I add some far away woods; I merge two photographic elements, carefully extracting trees, color correct them with Levels and Curves, and I paint in some really fine branch details.

⚡ PRO TIP

Use painted masks for extractions

When you're dealing with problematic extractions, like trees, grass, flowers, bushes or clouds, you're never going to achieve a good result by using just one tool or technique. My advice is to start by producing a rough layer mask using the Wand tool; then you can paint inside the mask itself to manually refine alpha channels with paint strokes. This technique requires time but it grants you complete control on edges' transparency. Remember that to make the mask visible in your canvas you have to select it with your mouse and press Alt while clicking the left button.

During this step I am very careful about choosing the proper scale for vegetation in order to achieve a realistic result, and dilate space through a sense of distance. I then paint the waterfall and add some more haze with a big Chalk brush, opacity reduced to 5%.

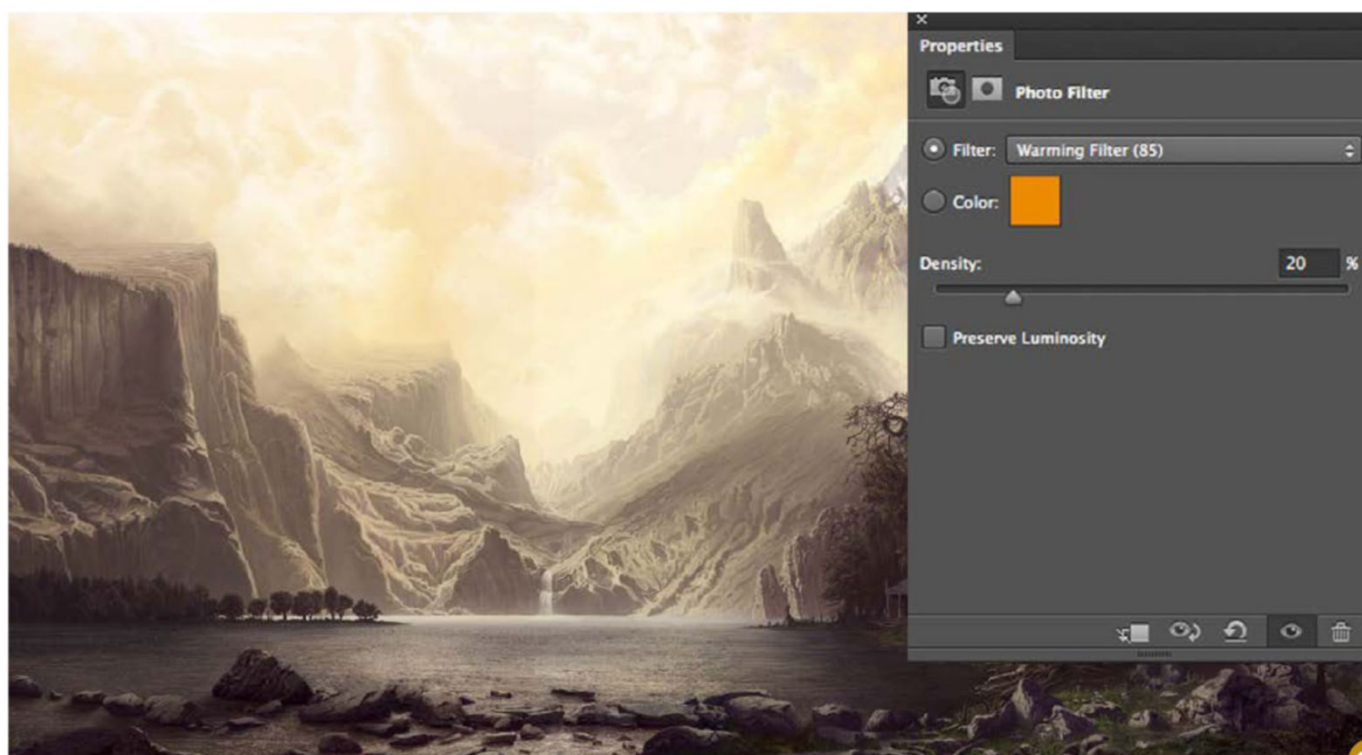
To finish, apply a warming photo filter as an adjustment layer; it's a really nice tool but it must be used carefully. If you leave opacity at 100% it's going to be overwhelming, my advice is to reduce it to at least 20%. ●

07 The Motion Blur filter is a useful and handy tool when it comes to creating and easily controlling fake reflections

08 To bring the image together a subtly warm filter is added at the end



07



08

The Artist

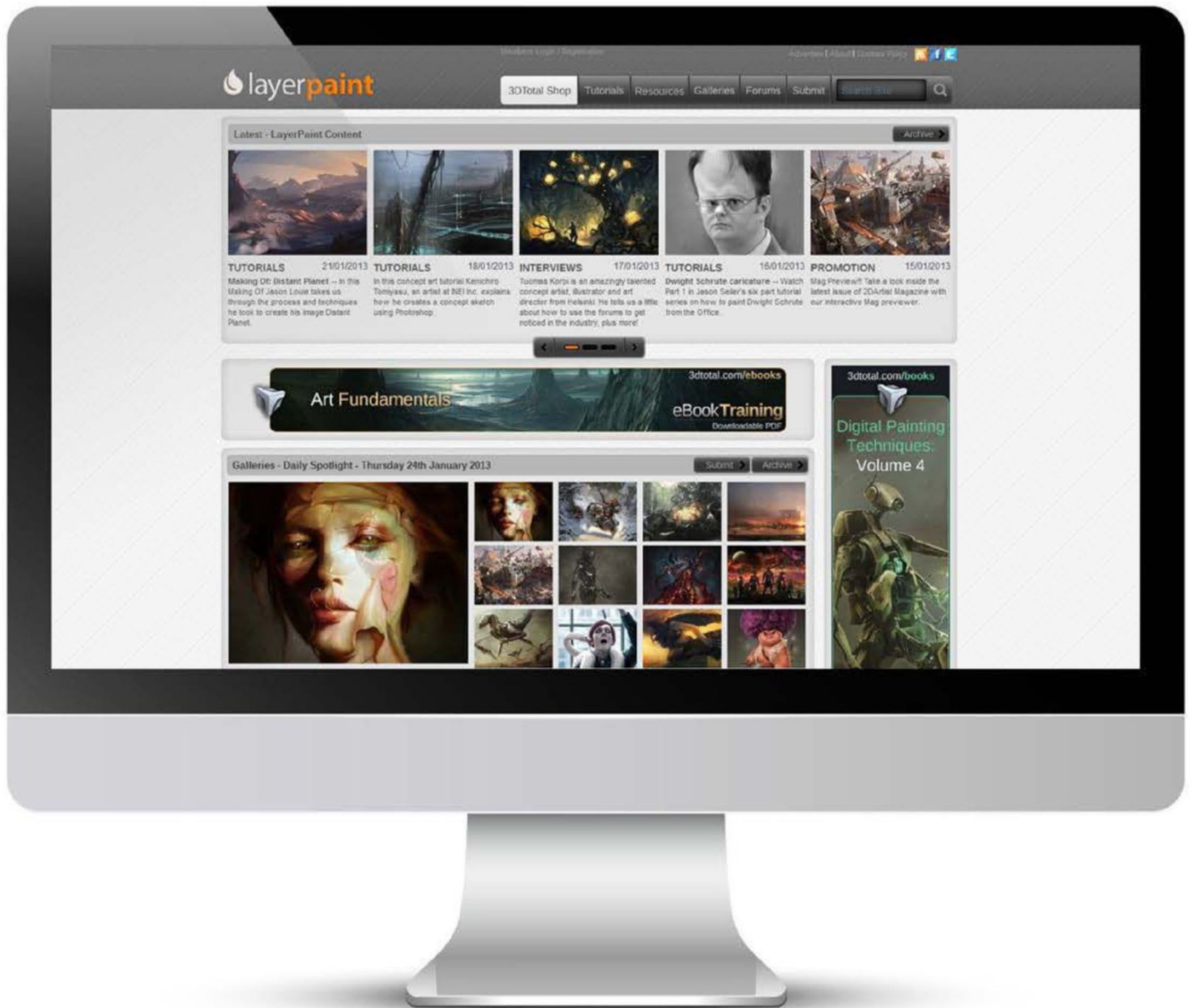


Davide Binello

vimeo.com/davidebinello







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The Artist



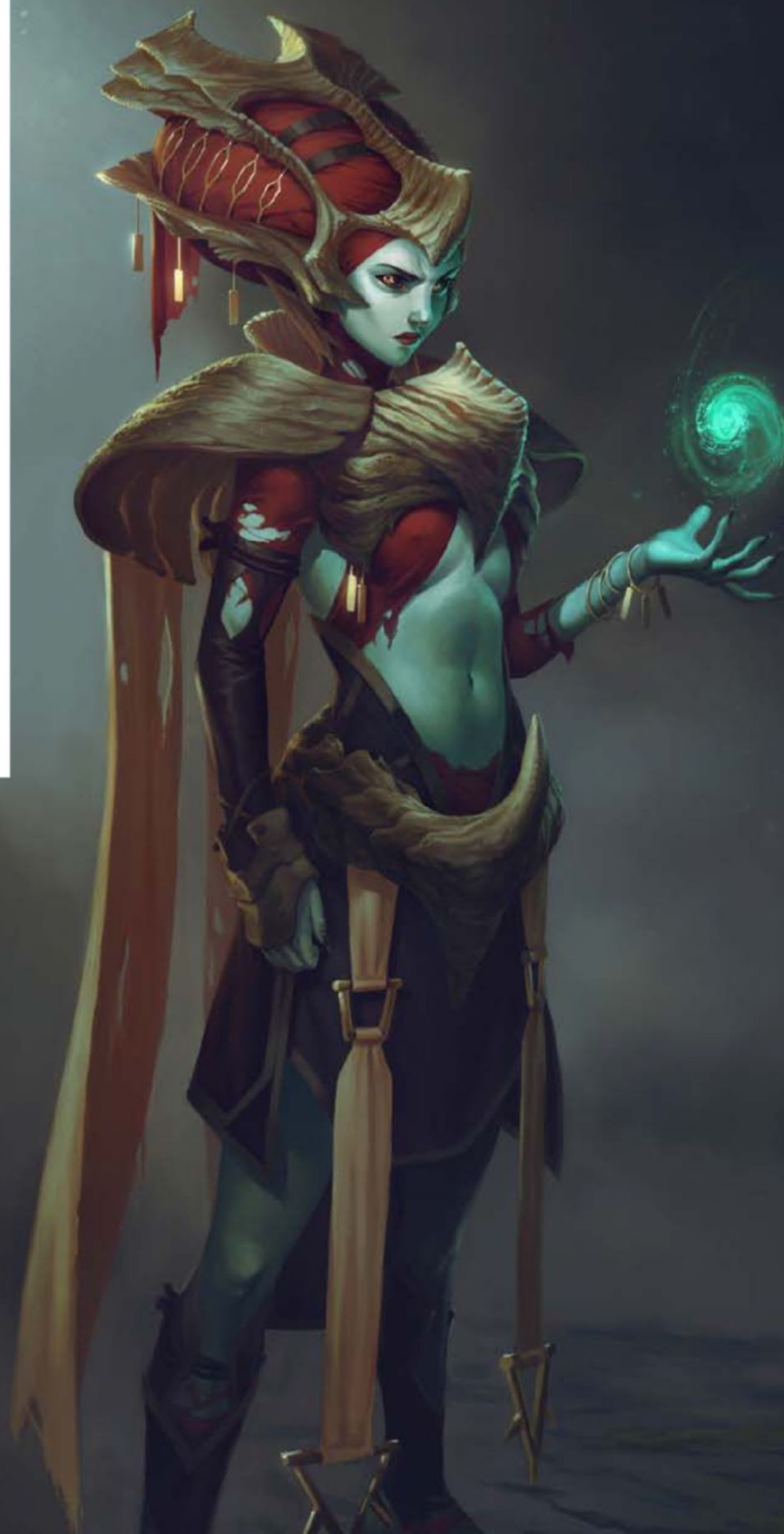
Cristina Lavina

cargocollective.com/cristinalavina

Software Used:

Photoshop

Cristina Lavina worked as a concept artist for more than 2 years at Opus Artz (London), where she learned a lot by the hand of Bjorn Hurri. She had the chance to work on multiple projects like *Sacred 3* and *Battlefield Hardline*. Cristina is currently working at Fathom Interactive, Vancouver, developing cool games for mobile phones and tablets.



Craft dynamic characters

Cristina Lavina guides you through her character design process. From the initial sketches and blocking in color, to lighting and the final render, Cristina explains her decisions and choices along the way ▶

Take a look at the process behind *The Witch*...

This tutorial will show the whole process of a character design, from the design steps, color and lighting, to the final render.

For this character I didn't want to do a conventional witch. I wanted to create a different race and try not to fall into stereotypes. Although, sometimes doing fantasy characters it is really hard to do something that hasn't been seen yet, but it's very important to try to push the design and not stay with the first sketch you do.

01 Rough sketches: I started doing some rough sketches to try and find new ideas. I try thinking in different shapes and silhouettes. I then did a second pass on the sketches to see if I could find more interesting shapes. You can cut and paste different areas that you like in one design onto another to come up with new and different designs.

"Be patient, think and explore different shapes and ideas before you start rendering. If the design is not good it doesn't matter how good your render is"

02 Color - part of the design process: Some artists leave the color for the last step in the design, but I feel that color plays a big part in the design itself. That's why I like to experiment with color and values during the sketching process.

In this step I tried to play around to find different vibes for the character. Each color sketch defines a different attitude and personality for the character. I decided to go for the ones that are more evil looking. ▶

01 Playing with different shapes in my initial sketches

02 Experimenting with color options in the sketching stage



01



02

⚡ PRO TIPS

Define the design before rendering

Be patient, think and explore different shapes and ideas before you start rendering. If the design isn't good it doesn't matter how good your render is.

If you want to do something different, try not to fall off into stereotypes. Feel free to go crazy with ideas and see what comes to mind. Oh! And never stay with the first sketch; it's never the best one.

Values are the key

Take your time to work with and get the values of the painting right when you start rendering. This is the most difficult step, but if you achieve good values in a painting you'll have big part of the painting solved.



03

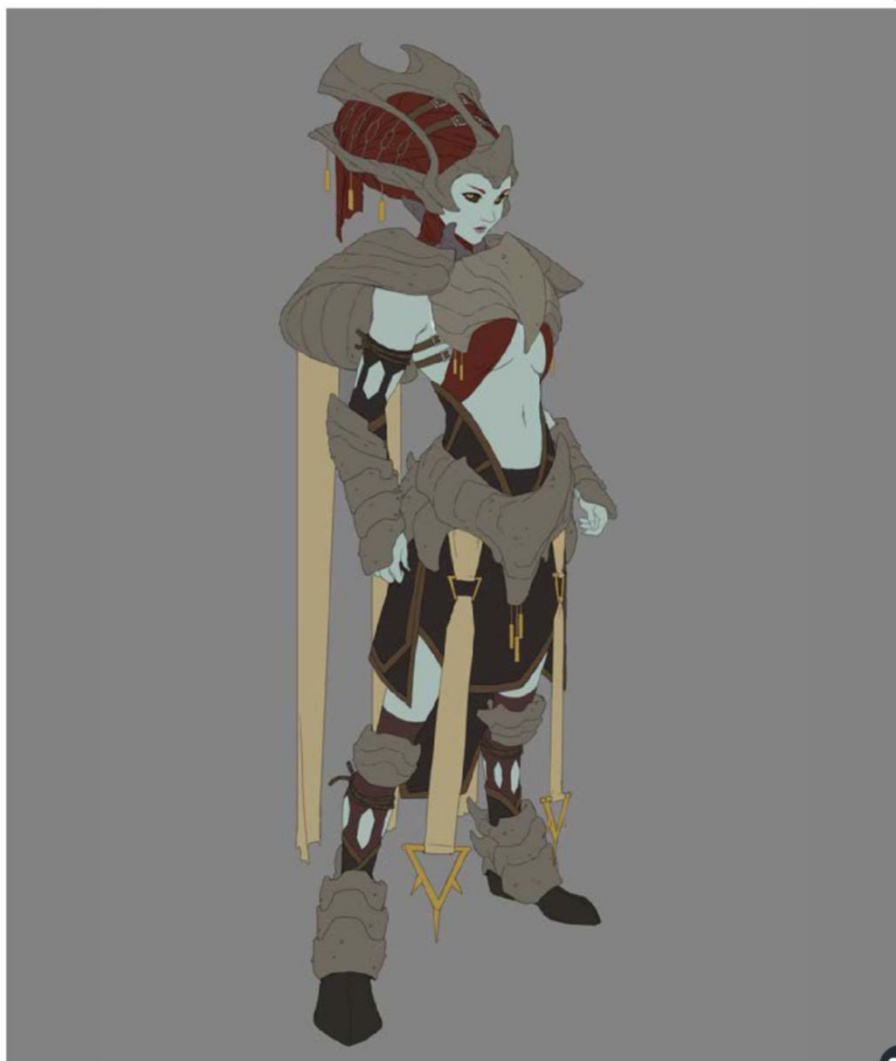
03 Color - part of the design process II:

At this stage I was moving forward and getting closer to a design I was happy with. I decided to go with option 02, because the values on option 01 are quite boring and too similar to each other.

04 Cleaning up and blocking in colors:

My mind works better if I start with a clean base. That's why I like to clean the design by tidying up the line work and blocking in the larger areas of base colors before I start to render the image.

05 Choosing a light source: First of all, I had to decide where the light sources came from. I decided to have the main light source shining down from the top-left behind the character, and I also wanted a cool light from a second light source at the front. With these placed I could start painting in the shadows and highlights, and begin to define the volumes. ▶

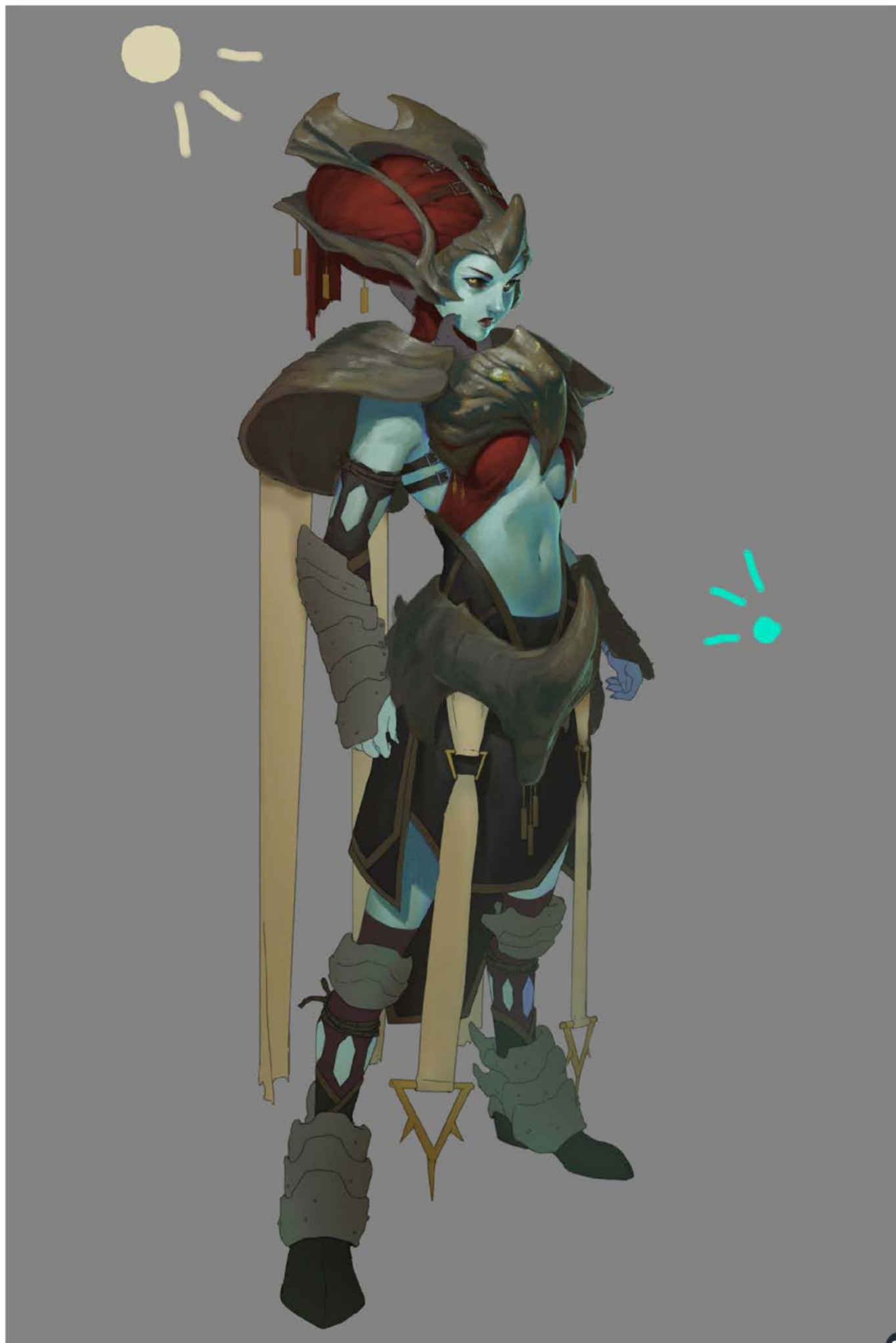


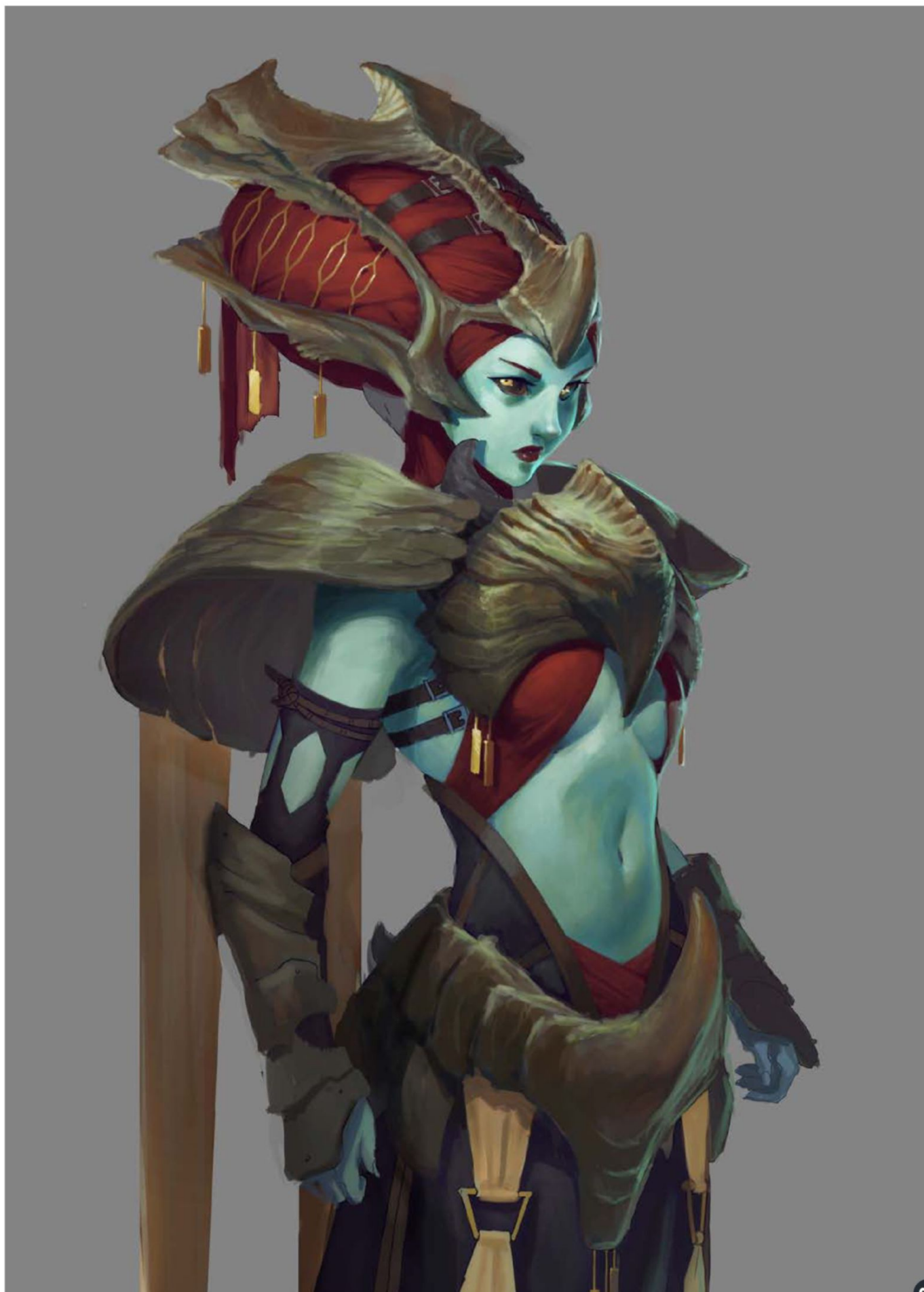
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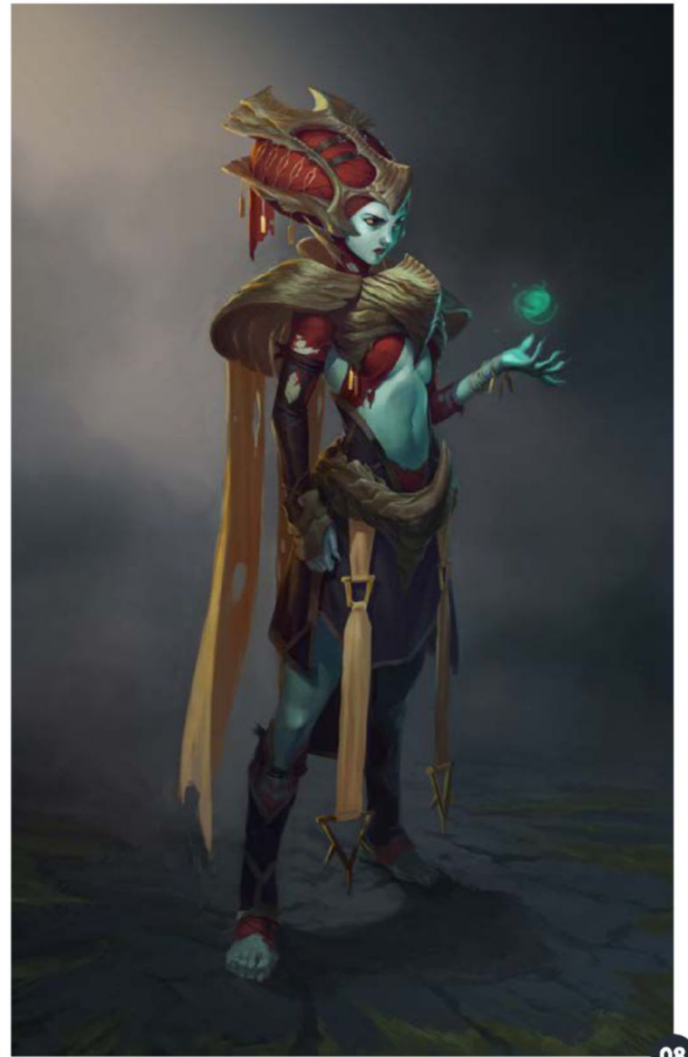
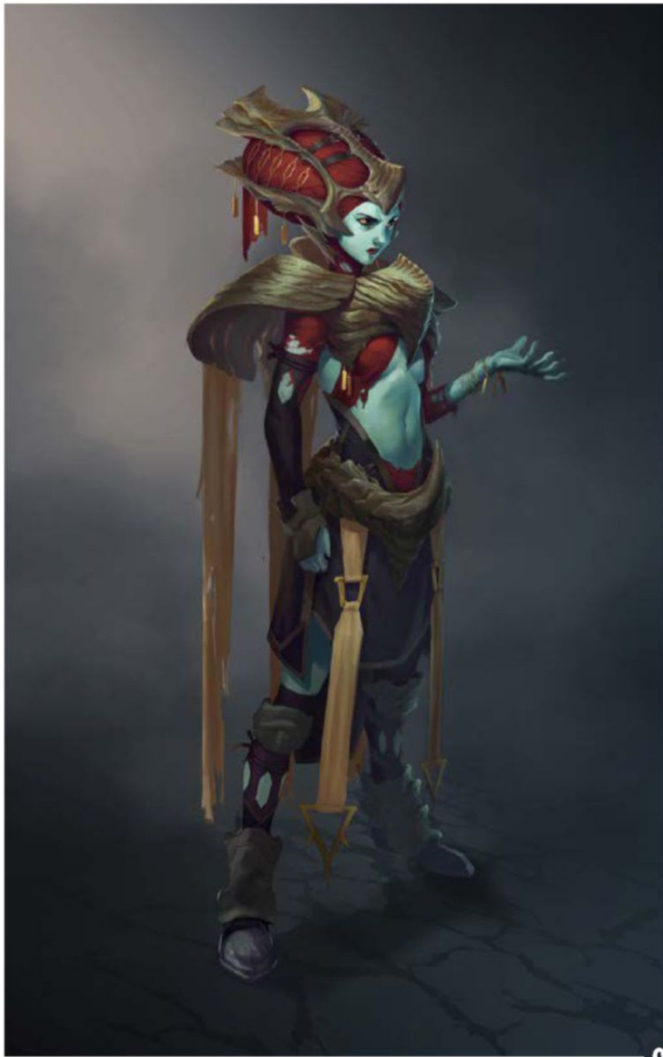
03 Selecting my final color palette

04 Creating neater lines and base colors

05 Placing the light sources



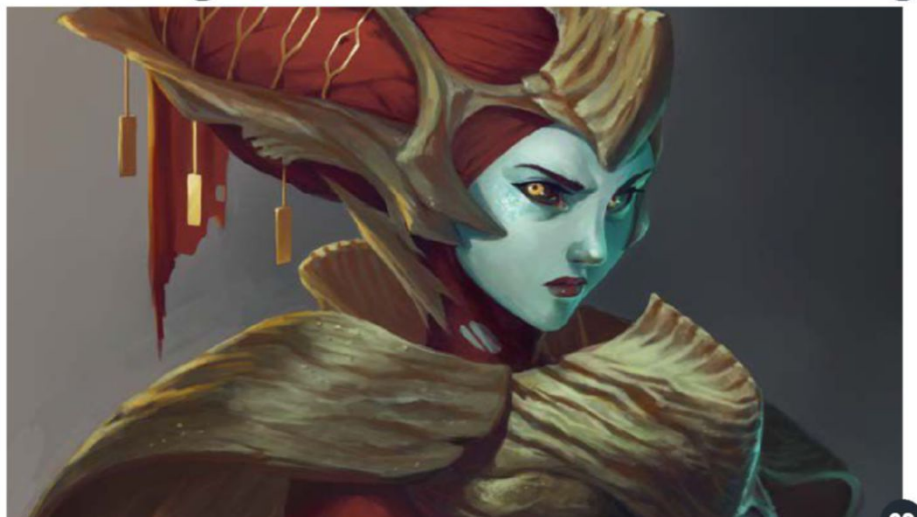




06 Thinking in materials: Every material reacts differently to the light sources, and it's important to pay attention and try to understand each of them. In other works I have used photos to define materials, but I recommend not always relying on photos, because it's better if you try to achieve and understand the material by yourself.

07 Background: I decided to introduce a simple background to place the character in, so the character appears grounded somewhere. I also decided to make her hand the focal point of where the cool second light source came from. This witch needed a bit of magic.

08 Rendering: Something wasn't working on the lower part of the design, so I decided to make the lower area a lot simpler. I didn't want to have all that weight at the feet as this area wasn't important enough for me, and I didn't want it to take attention away from the character's face. Although, this is something that you can only do with your personal work; if a client approves a sketch, you have to stick with it. That's why the sketching process is so



important. You should never deliver a sketch you're not 100-percent happy with.

09 Detailing: I started to tighten up the details and render in the focal point. Try not to zoom in too much until you have defined all the light and materials, as it's easy to get carried away with the details if you zoom in to the image too early. ►

06 Painting the different materials according to how they react to light

07 Adding in a background

08 Simplifying the lower half of the image

09 Refining the details on the character's face

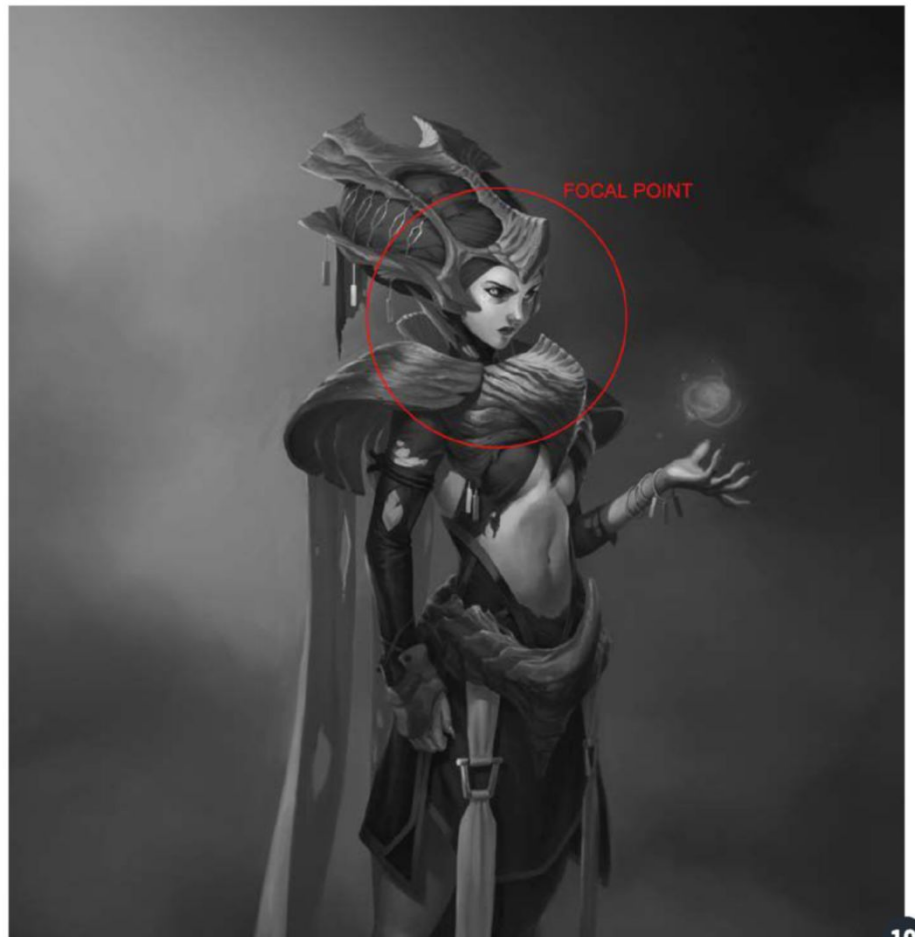
“I always have an Adjustment layer of Hue/Saturation in grayscale (in the Color layer mode) to check my values as I go along”

10 Focal point: This step is just a reminder. It's very important to keep in mind all the time the focal point of the painting. I always have an Adjustment layer of Hue/Saturation in grayscale (in the Color layer mode) to check my values as I go along. Value mistakes are easy to spot on the grayscale mode.

11 Final details: I added in some final details to the focal point such as shadows and highlights, and tightened up the materials a bit more. Finally, to finish the image off, I painted in some particle effects to the magic and added some smoke in the background. ●

10 Check your values often!

11 Adding in some final atmospheric details



10



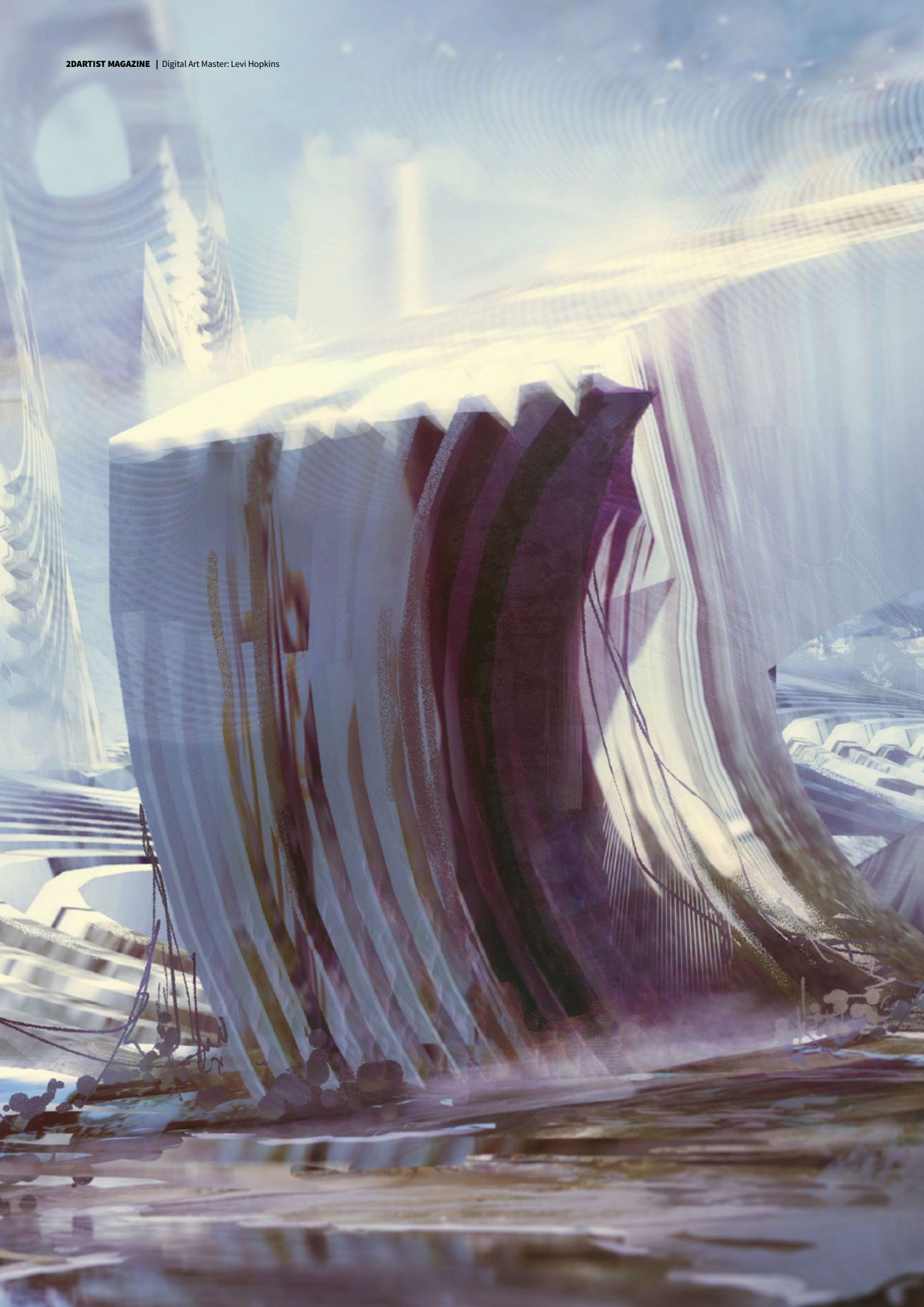
11

The Artist



Cristina Lavina
[cargocollective.com/
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I often find that commissioned work does not give me enough time to explore experimental techniques due to the strict deadlines and very specific design briefs, so whenever I get a break from work, I like to test out interesting techniques in my concept art. As this example was one of my own experimental pieces, I was able to start it with a different mindset.

When starting this piece, I had already decided that I wanted to describe some ruins in a landscape; however, I wanted to avoid the generic castle covered in vines. So I first gathered some references of various buildings, objects or color palettes I liked, to get the creative juices rolling.

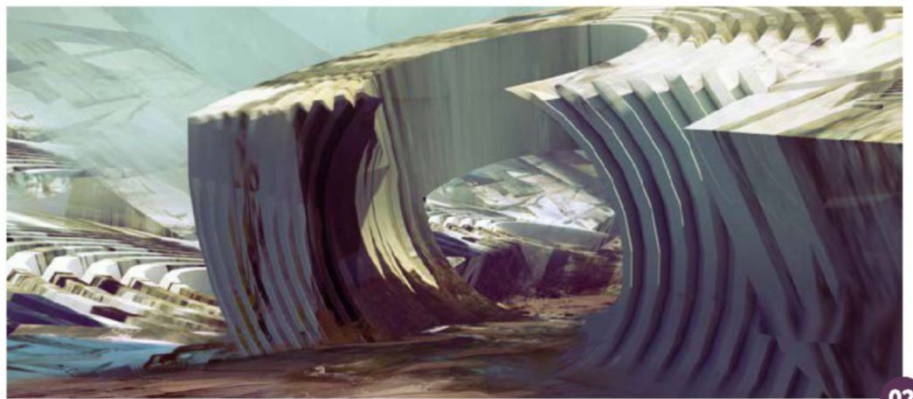
Using 3D

The next step was to use a 3D package to model out a basic block of geometry. I knew I wanted a shape with concentric circles repeating in an abstract shape, so I went ahead and did some basic modeling to achieve that. I then just rendered out a standard gray material on the object and went straight to Photoshop with the render. Next, I decided to apply some basic colors and brush strokes to the object and the background (Fig.01).

With this solid object in place, I slowly started fleshing out the scene, providing a simple ground plane and adding more ruins in the background. I treated my layer with the original render from 3D as a custom shape and just placed it in the background a number of times. I then moved, shifted, skewed and distorted



01



02

the background objects as necessary, to nudge them into perspective and help to create a good composition (Fig.02).

Painting

I wanted to create some contrast to the overpowering horizontal planes created by the

main chunk of ruins, so I added some standing columns in the background to distract the eye with vertical elements.

To do this, I laid down some simple brush strokes in order to find an arrangement that worked for me. Following the idea of custom shapes, I next



03



04



05

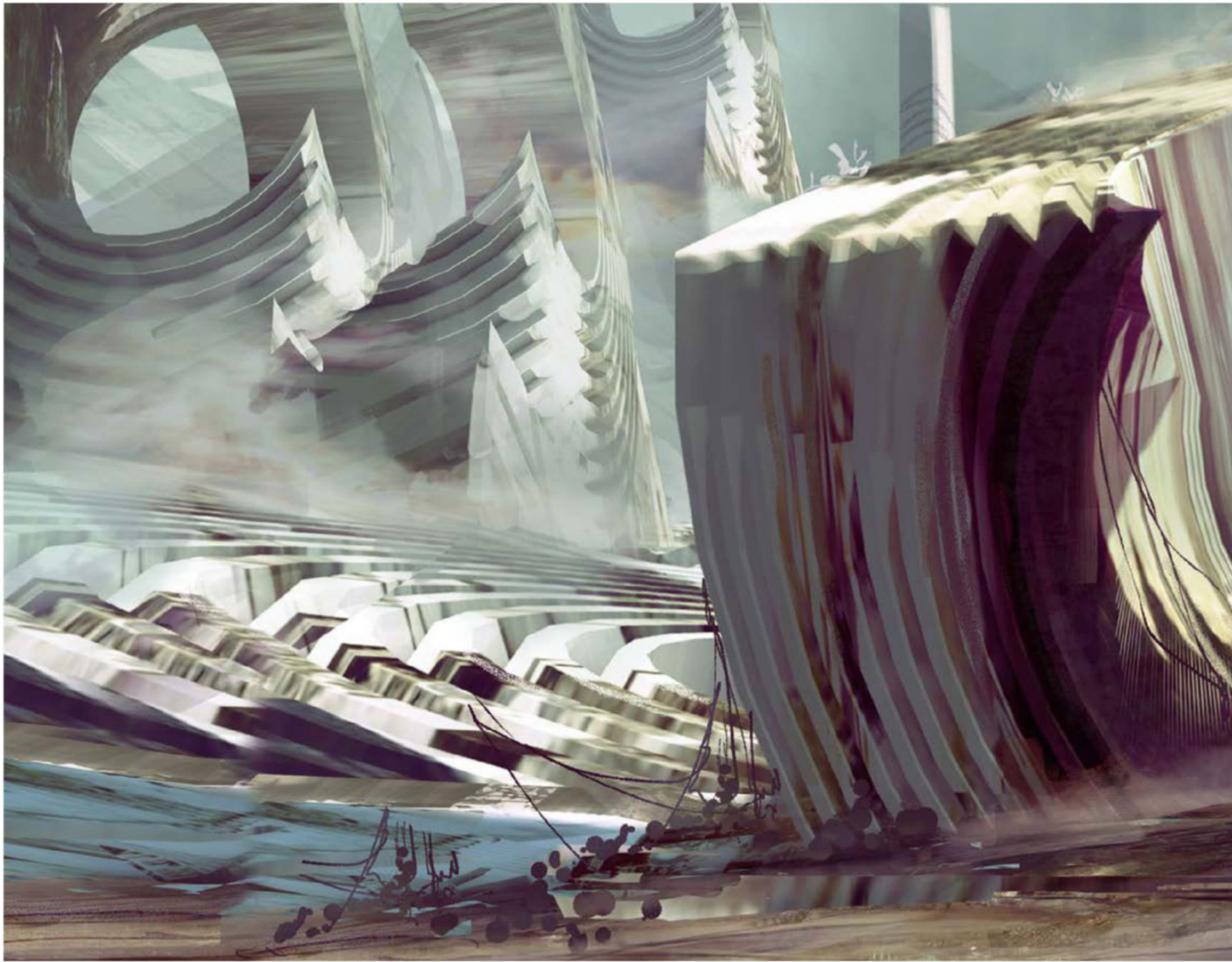
duplicated the layer containing the main ruins and rotated it vertically. I then just resized it, which transformed it into the correct alignment (**Fig.03**). I can save a lot of time when painting just by reusing certain chunks of the painting I've already established.

Next, I painted in more details by jumping around the canvas with no real plan in mind. Adding in the standard clichéd birds for scale was obviously necessary at this point too. I also added an

adjustment layer at this point to push back some of the saturation and create a more cohesive palette (**Fig.04**).

I continually used adjustment layers during the painting process. The nice thing about these is that I can just turn them off or delete them later on and go back to a prior state. I never fully commit to anything in a painting, which allows me the flexibility to change things on a whim.

At this point I realized I wanted to add a foreground element and bring the scene closer to the viewer, alongside some more elements to convey scale. I quickly blocked in the silhouette of a simple character riding some sort of animal (**Fig.05**). Now, stepping back from the painting I realized I was too closely focused on the scene, so I simply used the Crop tool and expanded the canvas horizontally. Once the canvas was widened I went ahead and started adding some more atmospheric elements: clouds, haze,



and floating particles (**Fig.06**). By adding these elements I was able to start separating individual elements of the painting and really accentuate the depths between the foreground, mid-ground, and background.

Now that the image was almost entirely blocked in, I started adding small details that I hadn't considered before. I didn't detail the whole image to the same extent across the canvas, but rather picked and chose areas that I wished to attract the viewer's attention.

At this point I added some more detail and ruins to the foreground and a few more sections of the ruin to the mid-ground (**Fig.07**). I also included a small pool of water near the large ruins to add some reflections across the ground plane. I did this by simply duplicating the entire painting, flipping it vertically, and then erasing out areas until I revealed the pool of water I had envisioned. Then with a simple flat angled brush, I indicated the edges of the water with a bright white color.



Completing the scene

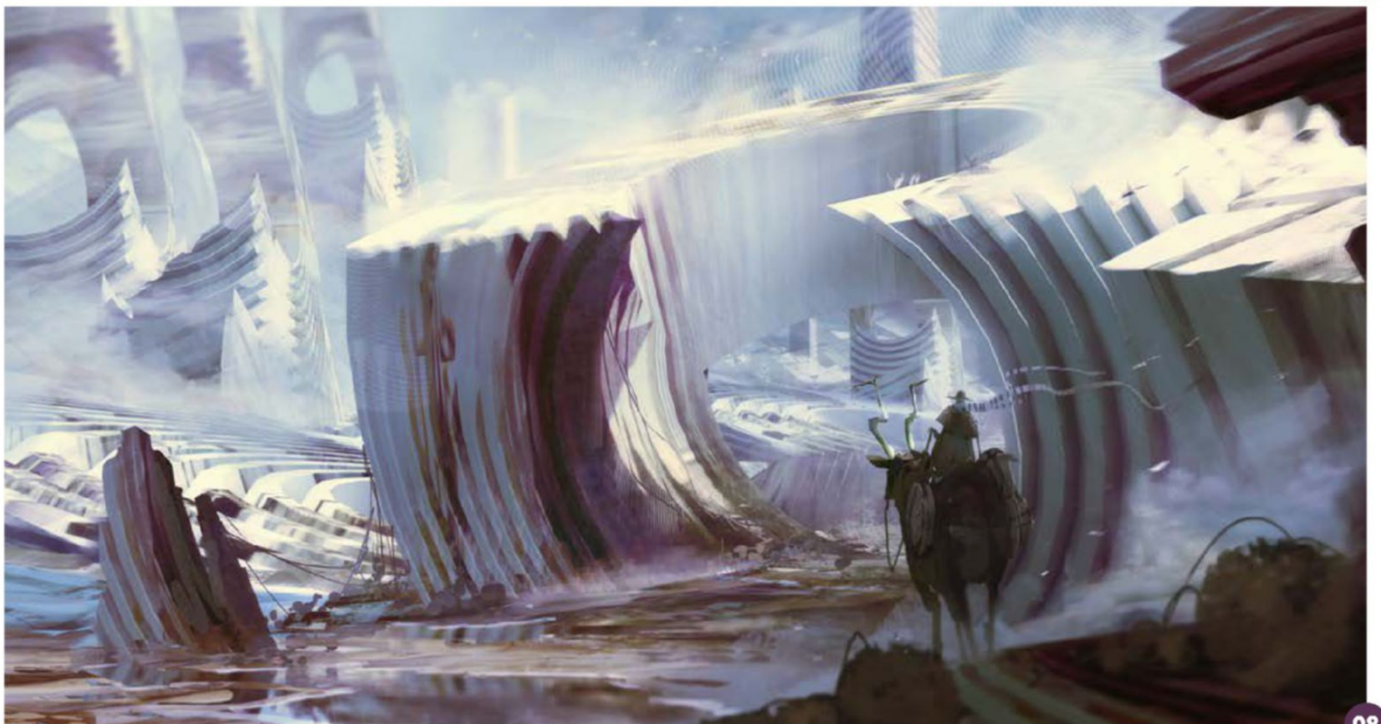
The final step in this process was to tweak the settings for the adjustment layers. I tend to use Curves, Color Balance, and the Channel Mixer (**Fig.08**). I can sit in this phase for hours, altering or modifying almost everything about

the painting. However, at some point you have to declare a piece complete, even if it's just a personal piece done for fun. If I'd never pulled the trigger and stepped away from this piece, I'd still be messing with adjustment layers to this day!

07



06



08

The Artist



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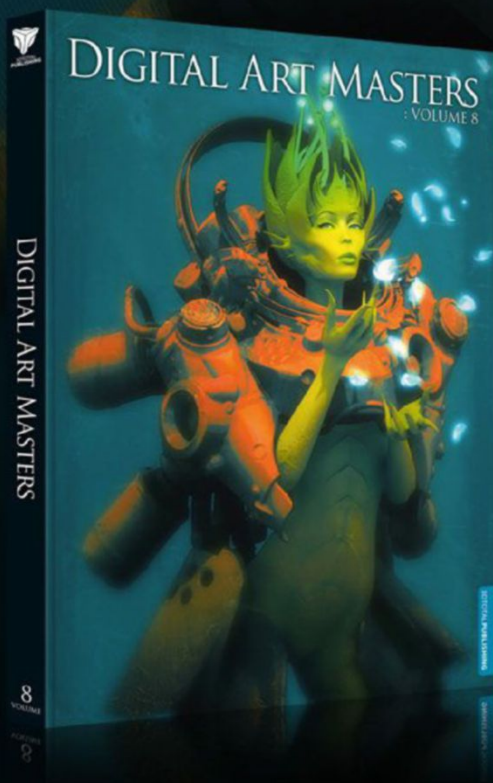
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